CORNUCOPIA

TURKEY FOR CONNOISSEURS

ISSUE 45 2011

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OIL-BOOM
PALACES

BLACK SEA
BEAUTIES

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CORNUCOPIA

TURKEY FOR CONNOISSEURS
ISSUE 45, 2011

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Cornucopia © Caique Publishing Ltd,
1 Rutland Court, Edinburgh EH3 8EY,
and Kayık Yayıncılık ve Turizm Ticaret Ltd Şti,
PK51, Teşvikiye, 34368 Istanbul
PRINTING: St Ives plc
COLOUR SEPARATION: Wyndeham Pre-Press Ltd
UK publisher: Caique Publishing Ltd,
a member of the Periodical Publishers Association.
DISTRIBUTION IN TURKEY:
Kayık Yayıncılık ve Turizm Ticaret Ltd Şti
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THE ORIGINAL 'CORNUCOPIA'
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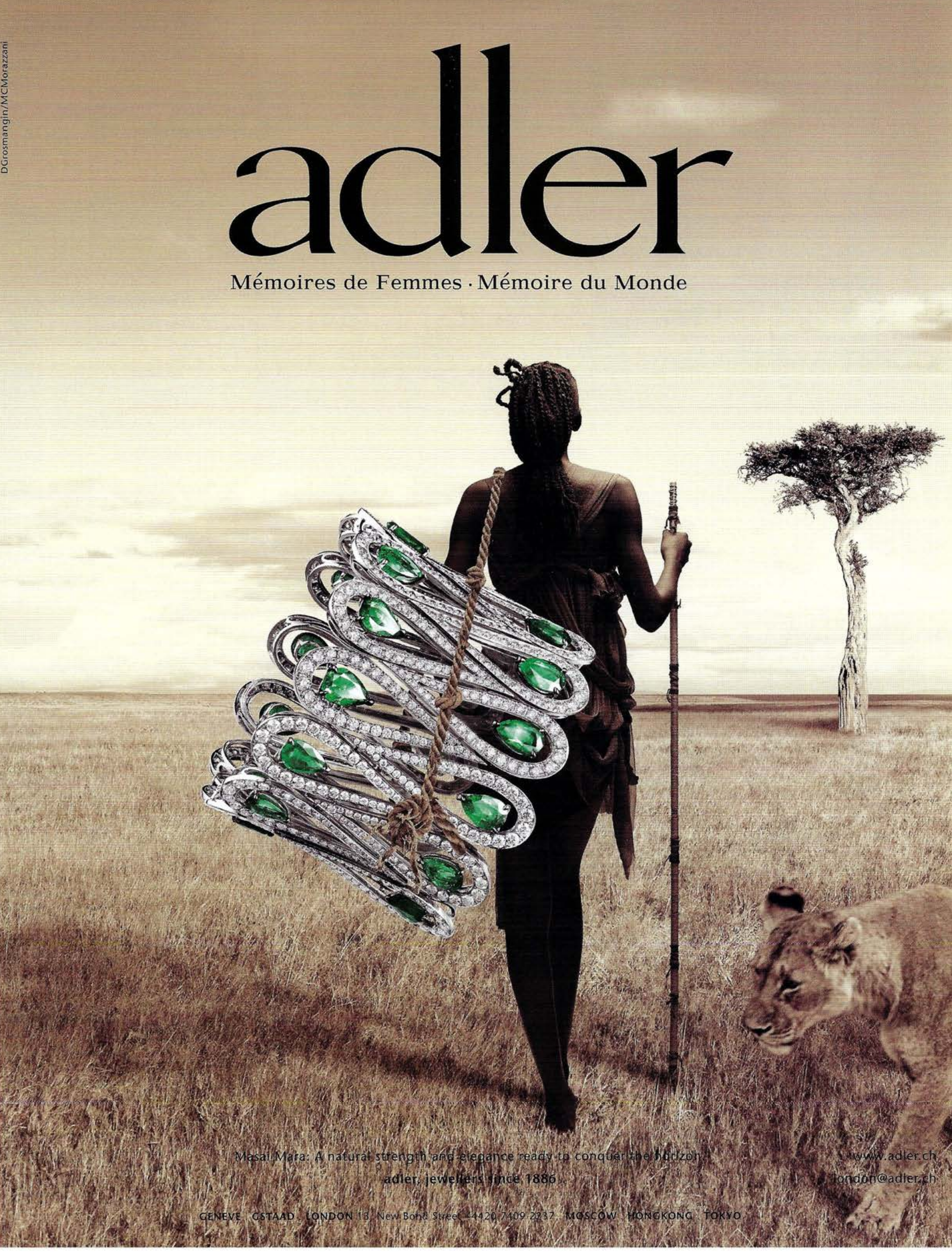
ISSN 1301-8175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CONNOISSEUR

Orientalism displays its finery, Afghan gold lights up London, a 2,000-year-old kilim comes to auction, plus the life and legacy of a great Hungarian collector

PAINTING THE ORIENT

A trio of exhibitions, in Doha, Munich and Madrid, celebrate the work of artists inspired by the Ottoman world

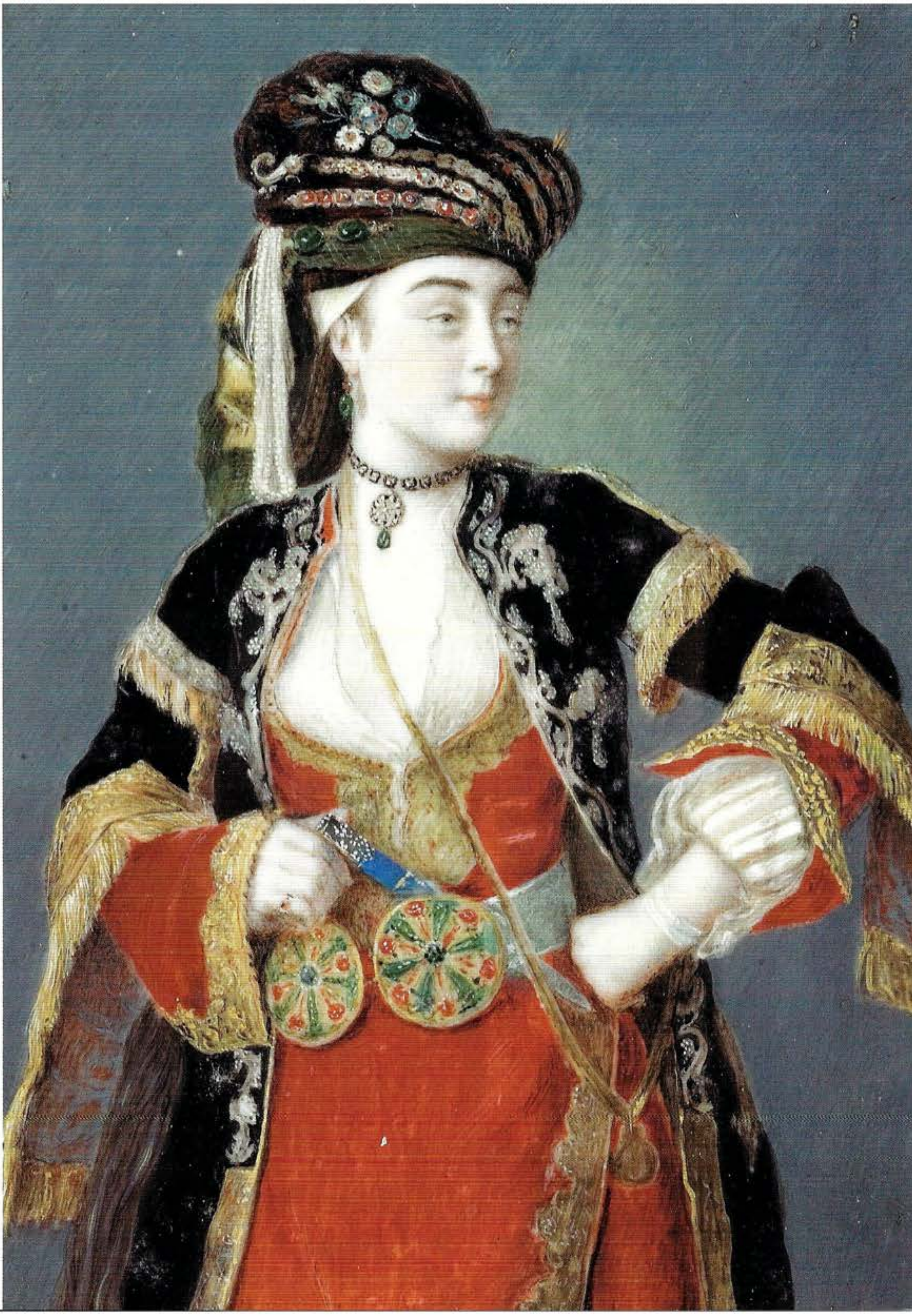
The Doha treasures

This profoundly beautiful portrait is one of four miniatures of a mysterious lady, painted on ivory around 1750 by the Swiss artist Jean Étienne Liotard. In each of them she wears a different-coloured dress with a decorative dagger. This one belongs to the Orientalist Museum in Doha, the others being in the Hermitage, the National Museum in Stockholm and the Fitzwilliam.

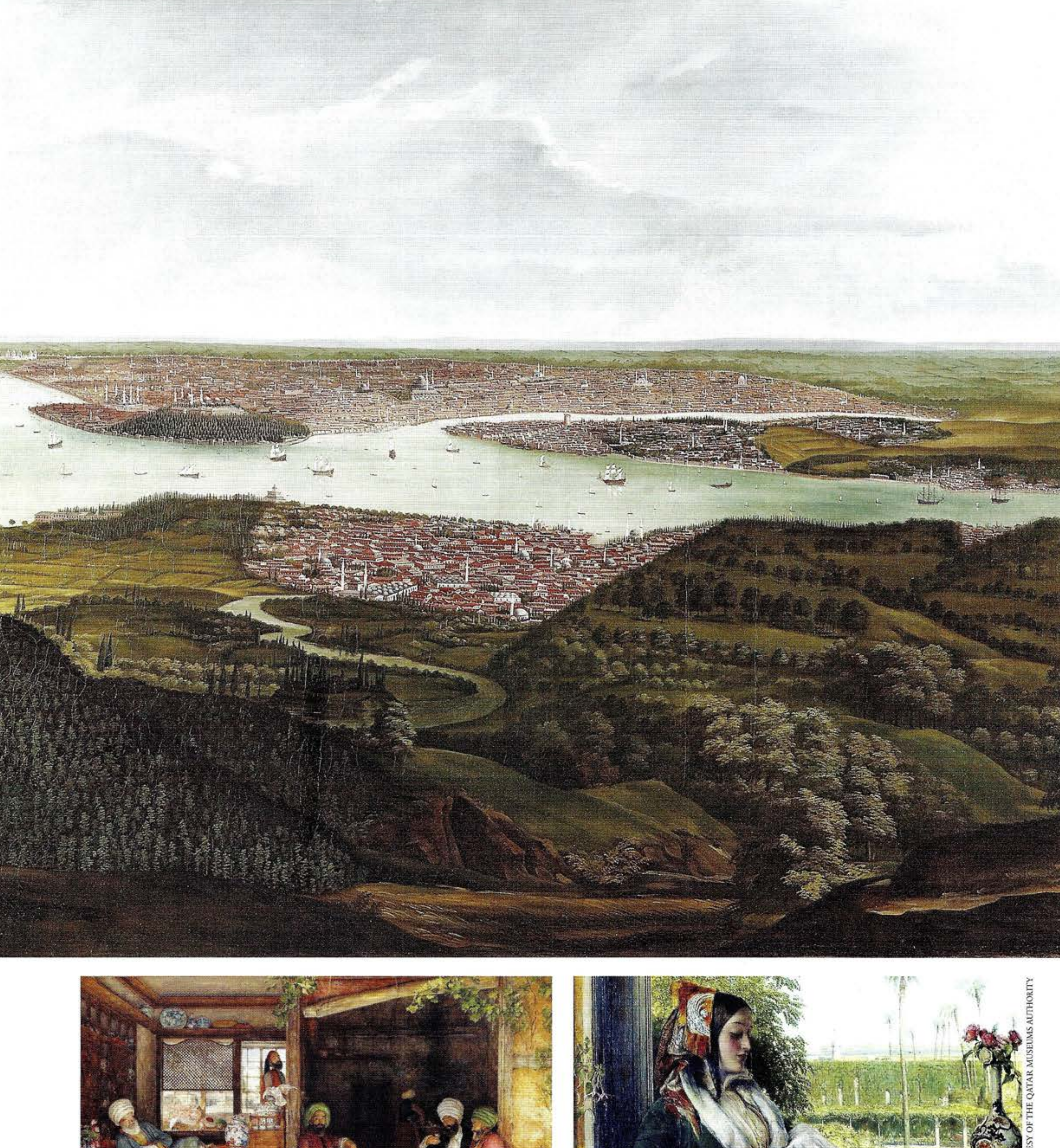
Liotard lived in Istanbul, adopted Turkish dress, which he continued to wear in Europe, and called himself 'the Turkish Painter'. He even painted his eminent clients, including the Empress Maria Theresa, in Turkish costume.

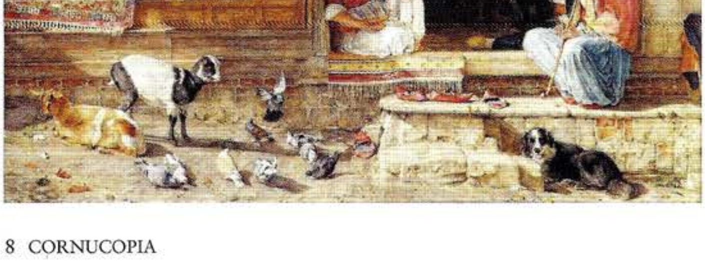
The painting is one of the highlights of **A Journey into the World of the Ottomans**, a temporary exhibition held recently at IM Pei's Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. This was the first show organised by Doha's Orientalist Museum, which is waiting to get a smart new building of its own. For those who missed the show, the catalogue of the same title, published by Skira, is available online from Cornucopia.

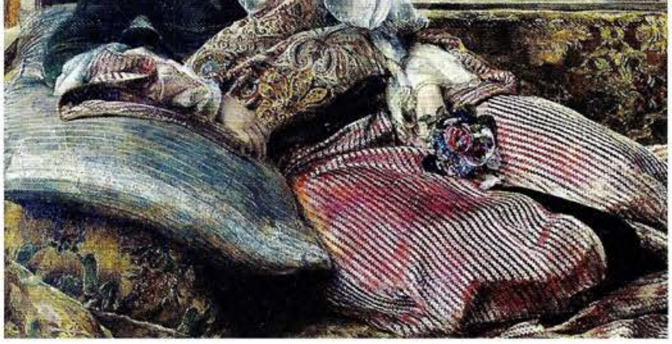
The Orientalist Museum already has almost a thousand paintings, watercolours, prints and sculptures, and is proving a generous lender. Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Le Barde Noir*, on page 12, is one of many works on loan to museums around the world, and there is talk of a show in Istanbul in 2012.



Jean Étienne Liotard's 1750 miniature on ivory of an unidentified beauty, from Qatar's Orientalist Museum







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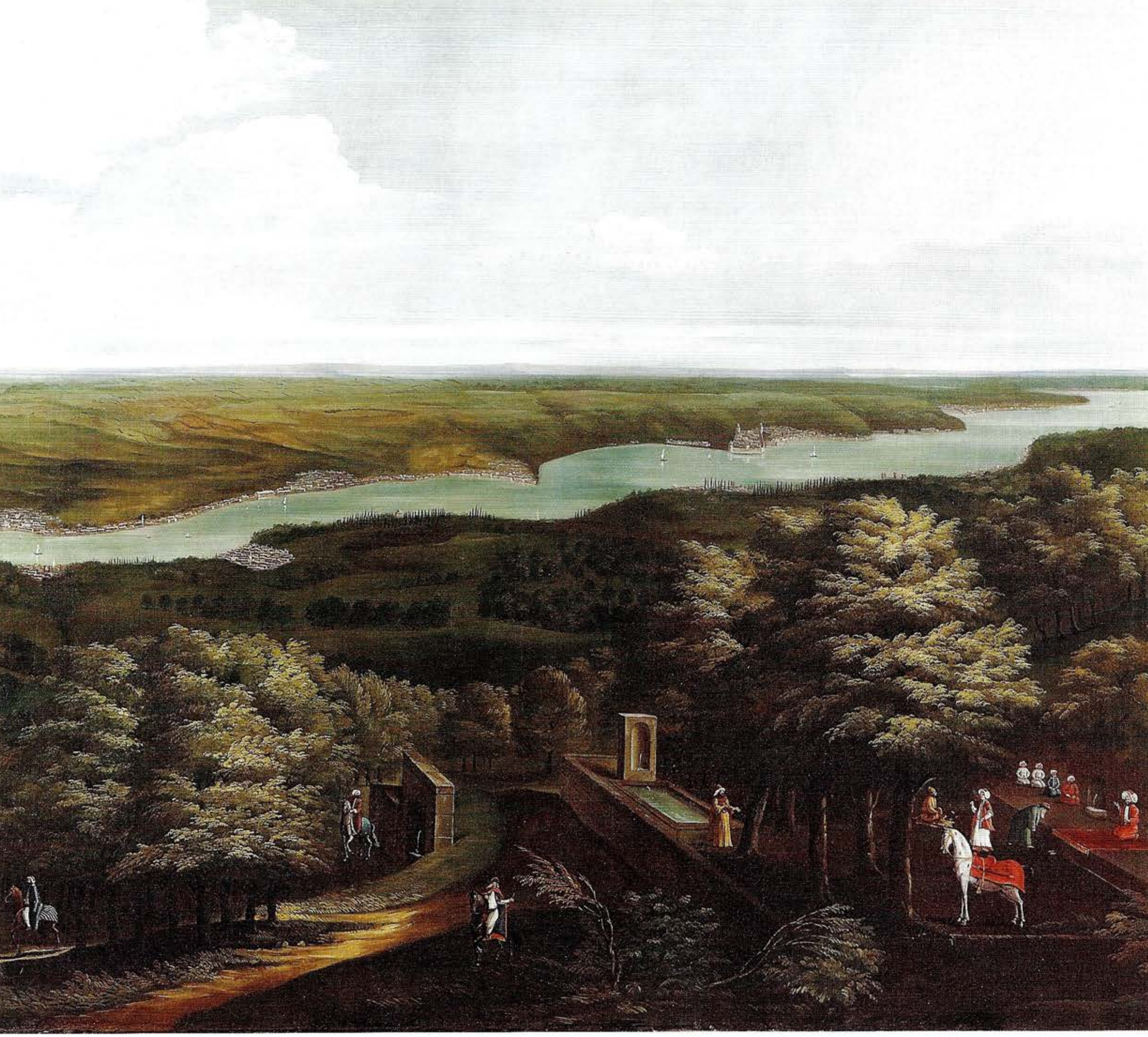
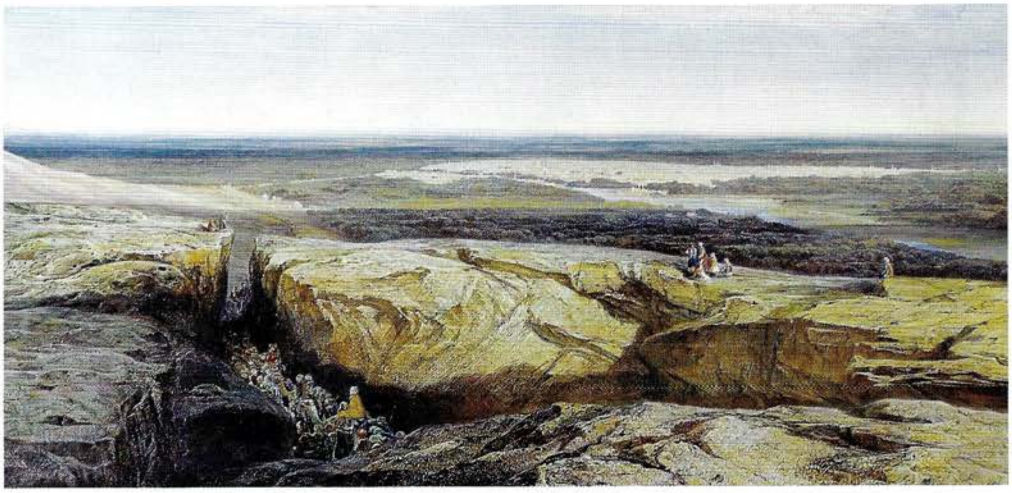


THE DOHA TREASURES

△ This splendid early-18th-century panorama of the Bosphorus by an unknown English artist was the centrepiece of **A Journey into the World of the Ottomans** in Doha.
◁◁ JF Lewis painted two versions of his famous *Kibab Shop in Scutari*, one in oil, the other in watercolour (see page 60). This oil version, from 1858, is in the same exhibition.
◁ In Lewis's *The Love Letter* (1854), the title refers to the posy the young woman is holding. The painting is one of Doha's loans to Munich for **Orientalism in Europe** (see overleaf).
▷ Also in the Munich show is Edward Lear's *Damascus* (1861) – another panoramic tour de force



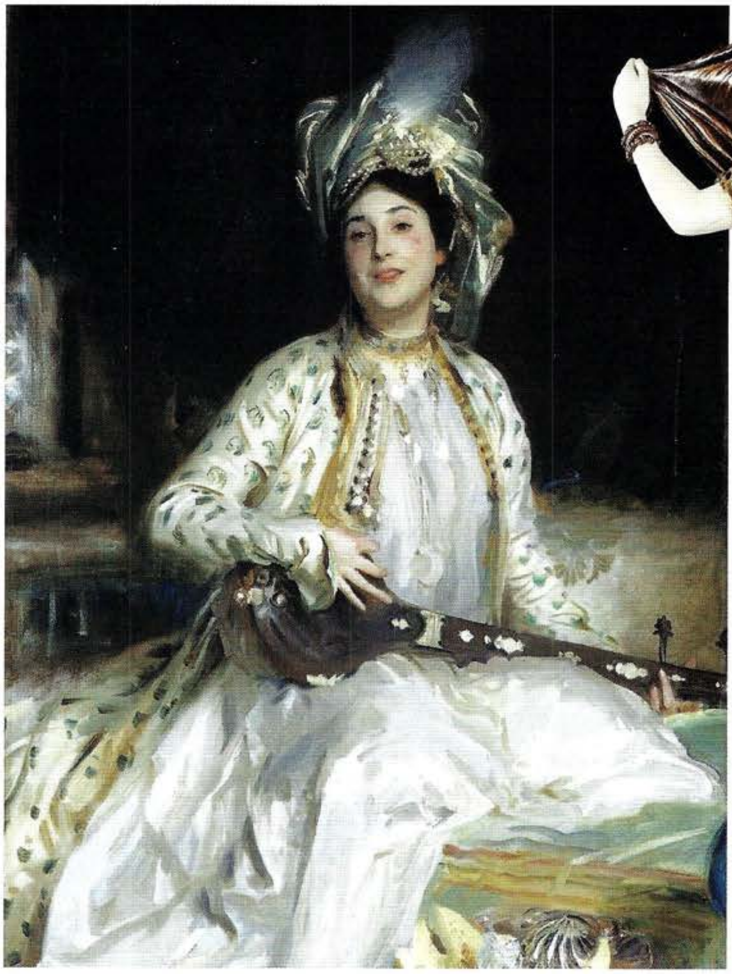
ORIENTALISM IN EUROPE

With the Middle East in turmoil, **Orientalism in Europe: From Delacroix to Kandinsky,** at the Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung in Munich (until May 1), the first survey of European Orientalism for decades, is attracting a lot of attention. The show goes on to Marseille (May 27 – Aug 28).

▷ This 1908 portrait by John Singer Sergeant is an elegant piece of fusion orientalism. Almina, daughter of the wealthy Bond Street merchant Asher Wertheimer, wears a cream satin dress and a plumed silk turban with pearls. The props, including the Indian instrument, the sarod, belonged to the artist's studio

▷▷ This alluring bronze-and-ivory statuette – *La Femme Voilée*, c1900 (66cm) – is by Jean-Léon Gérôme. Trained as a painter, he turned to sculpture towards the end of his life, in search of ever greater realism

▽ *Recruiting Soldiers, Jaffa*, by Gustav Bauernfeind (1888), depicts a moving scene witnessed by the artist, who was living in Palestine with his sister and her missionary husband. Ottoman recruiting officers, in starkly modern uniforms, stand at the end of the quay, as recruits are ferried to the ironclad on the horizon and the women lament. This modern history painting is almost three metres wide



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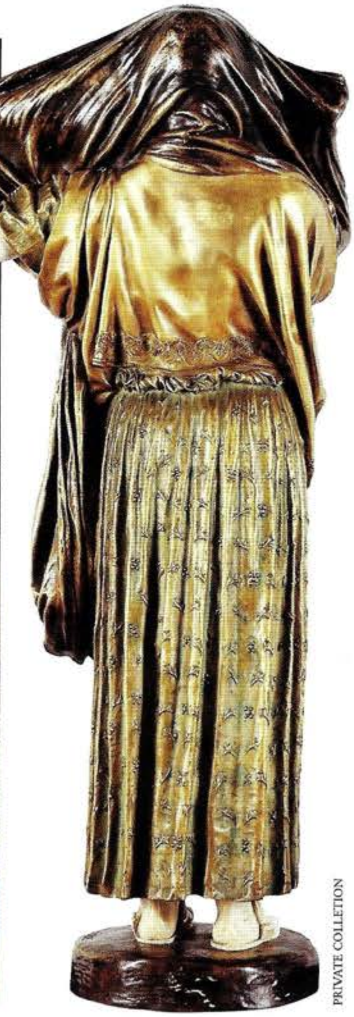
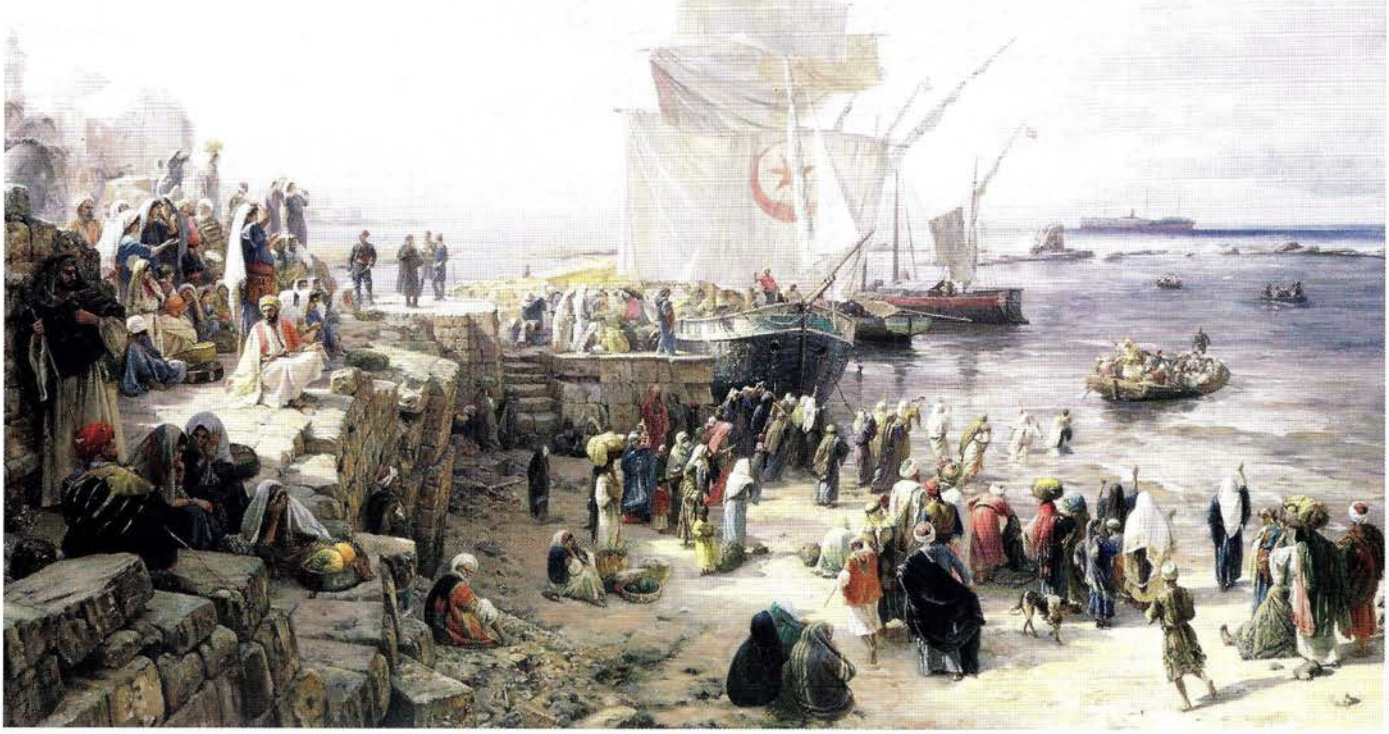
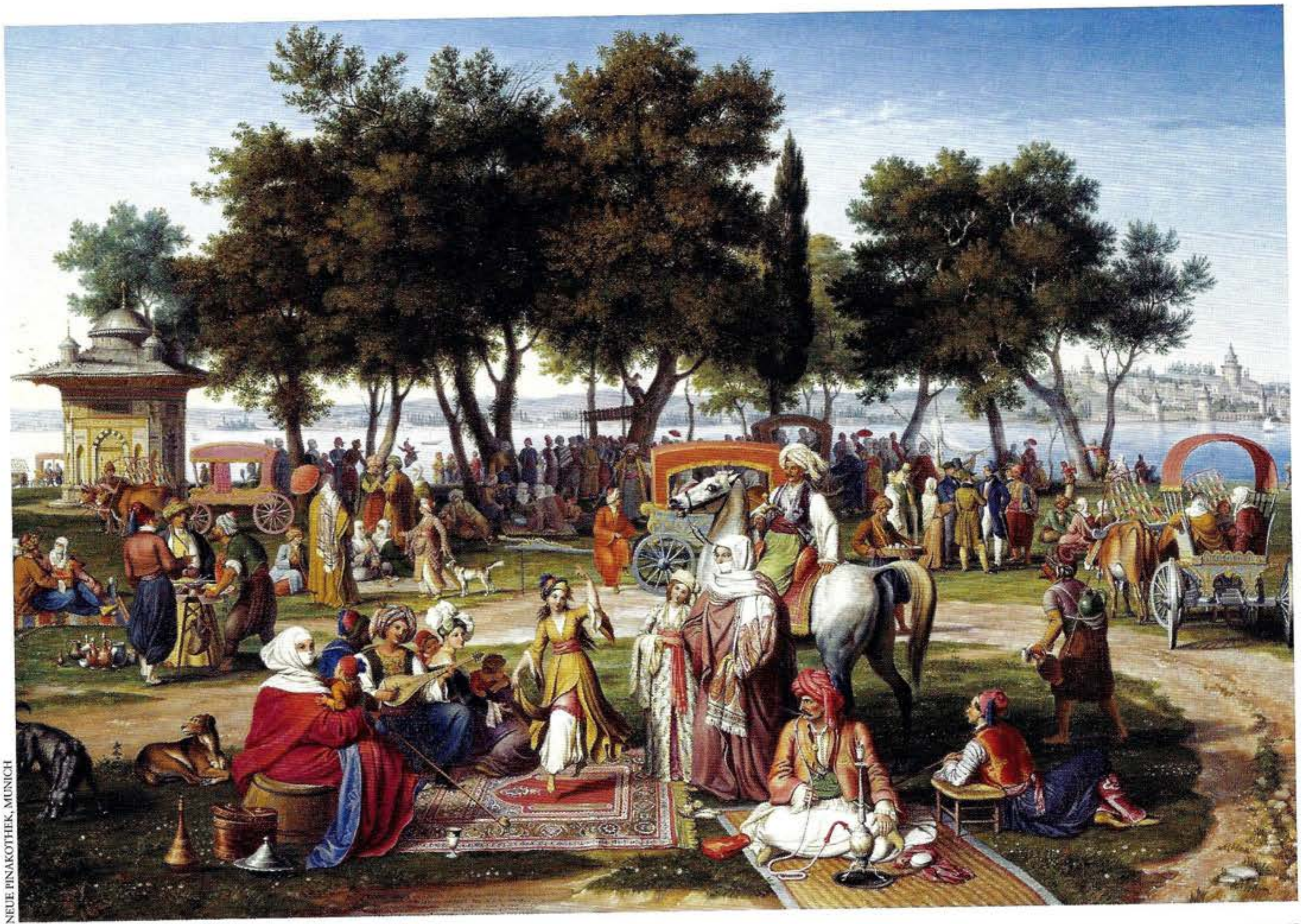


PRIVATE COLLETION



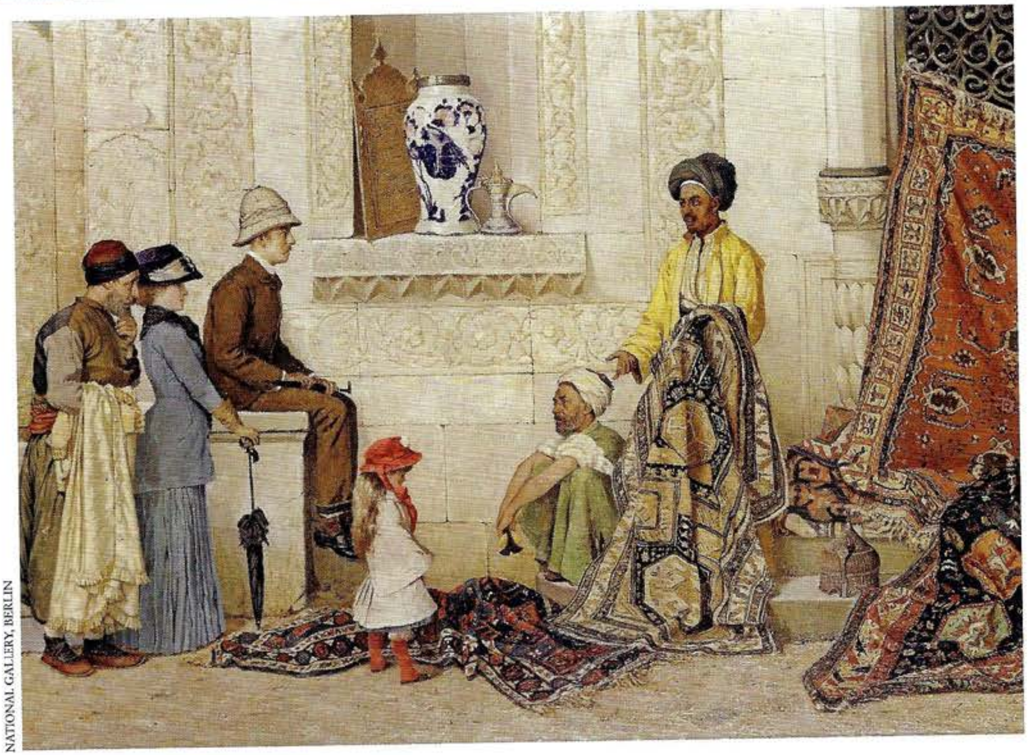
DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK



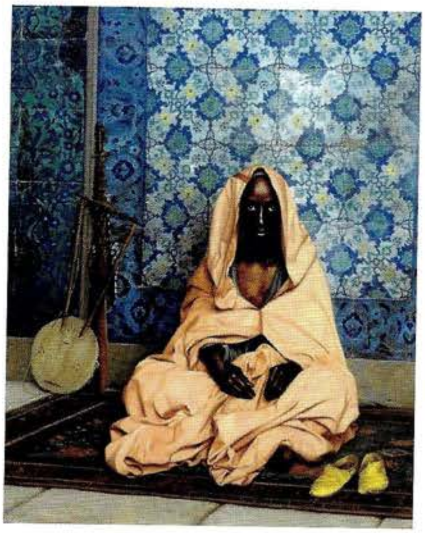
NEUE PINAKOTHEK, MUNICH

△ Johann Michael Wittmer's *At the Sweet Waters of Asia in Constantinople* (1837) is a deceptive work. The stock figures in the foreground are enjoying a classic Bosphorus picnic. But close to the water on the right appears a historic figure: Crown Prince Maximilian of Bavaria, brother of Otto, first King of Greece. The split in subject matter is intended to emphasise the divide between East and West

▷ Another fascinating essay on the cross-cultural theme in the Munich exhibition is *The Persian Carpet Seller*, a rarely seen work by Osman Hamdi, the father of Turkish archaeology. Highly regarded, it was exhibited in Berlin in 1888 and bought by the German government for Berlin's National Gallery. Here, then, is a Turkish painter trained in the West (in Paris, under Gérôme) painting a Western bourgeois family buying a souvenir in Constantinople



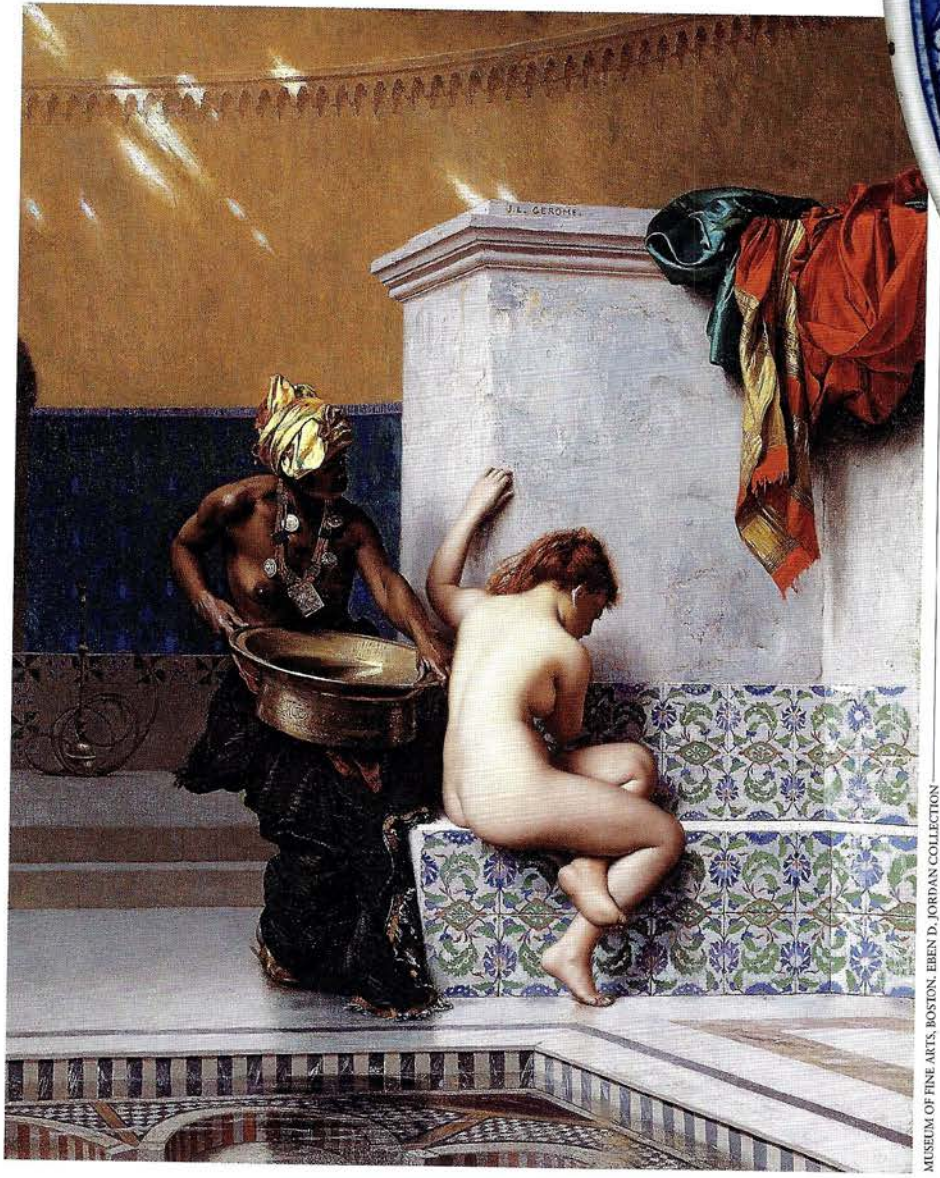
NATIONAL GALLERY, BERLIN



BEAUTY AND THE EAST

The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) is a blockbuster devoted to the French artist that ends its world tour at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (until May 22). ◁ In *Le Barde Noir* (*The Black Bard*) – one of the Doha paintings on loan to the exhibition – he depicts a 'Nubian musician' sitting cross-legged in a meditative pose. Painted in 1888, it represents the more reflective style of the artist's later years. His fondness for Islamic tiles has not diminished. Gérôme was probably working in this picture from a black-and-white photograph showing tiles in the Topkapı, since the designs are fairly accurate, but he took liberties with the colours.

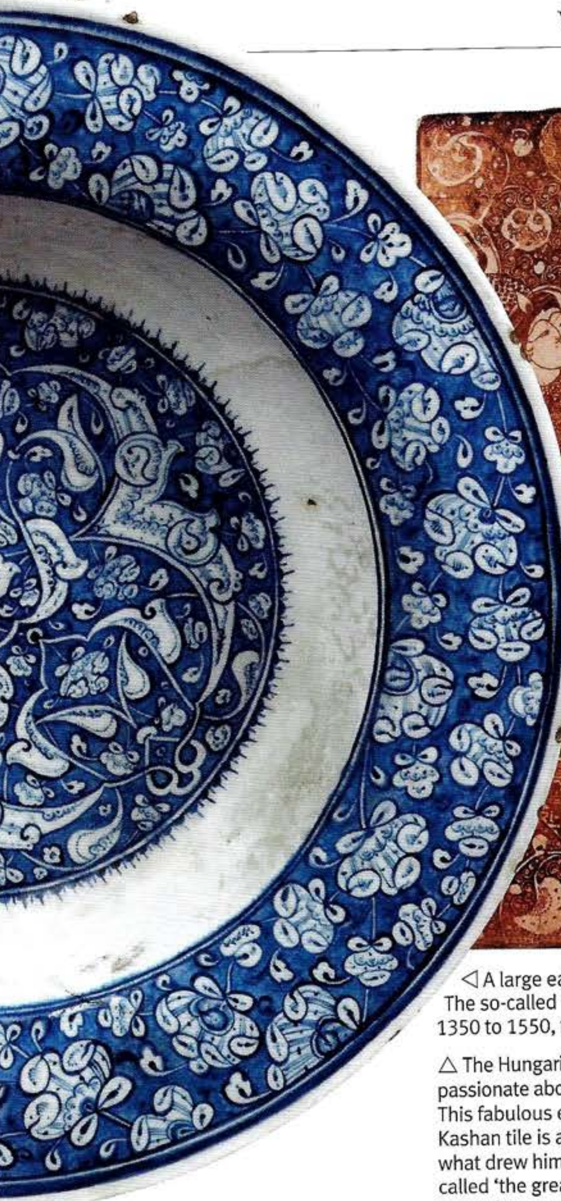
▽ Earlier in his career, Gérôme attracted outrage, as well as admiration, with his provocative depictions of pale-skinned women at the hamam, now much sought-after in Hollywood. They were based on sketches he made on visits to hamams in Bursa, Istanbul and Cairo. *The Moorish Bath* (1872, previously known as *Le Bain Turc*, in homage to Ingres) was started in London, but Gérôme was obliged to finish it in Paris for lack of a 'good Nubian' model.

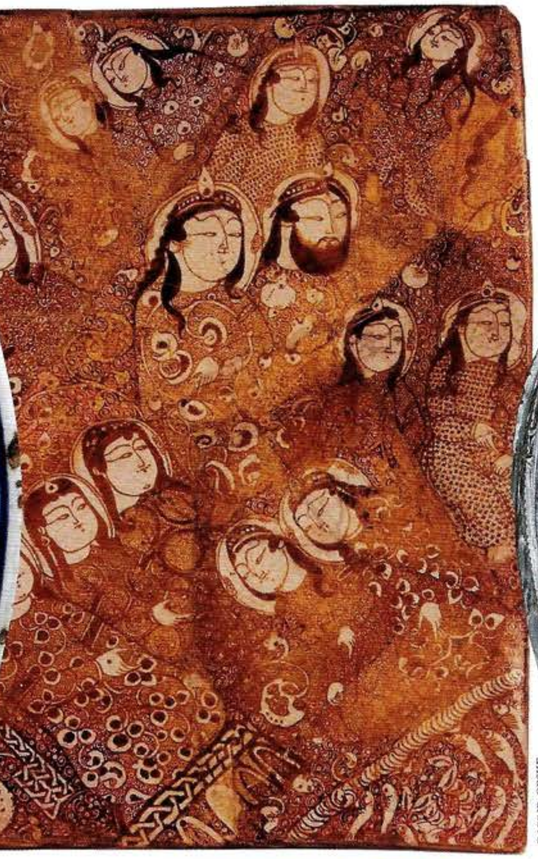


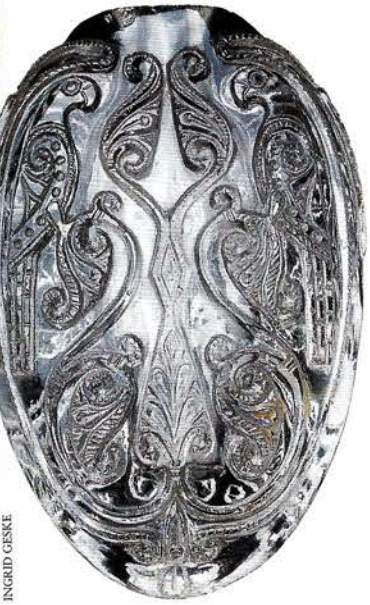
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON. EBEN D. JORDAN COLLECTION

BERLIN'S NEW TREASURES

THE MAGNIFICENT KEIR COLLECTION, ASSEMBLED BY EDMUND DE UNGER, WHO DIED IN FEBRUARY, HAS FOUND A NEW HOME IN BERLIN'S MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART. HERE ARE FOUR OF THE 1,500 PRECIOUS ITEMS THAT WILL GO ON SHOW WHEN A NEW WING OPENS ITS DOORS. AND ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES THOMAS ROUECHÉ TELLS THE STORY OF THE GREAT COLLECTOR





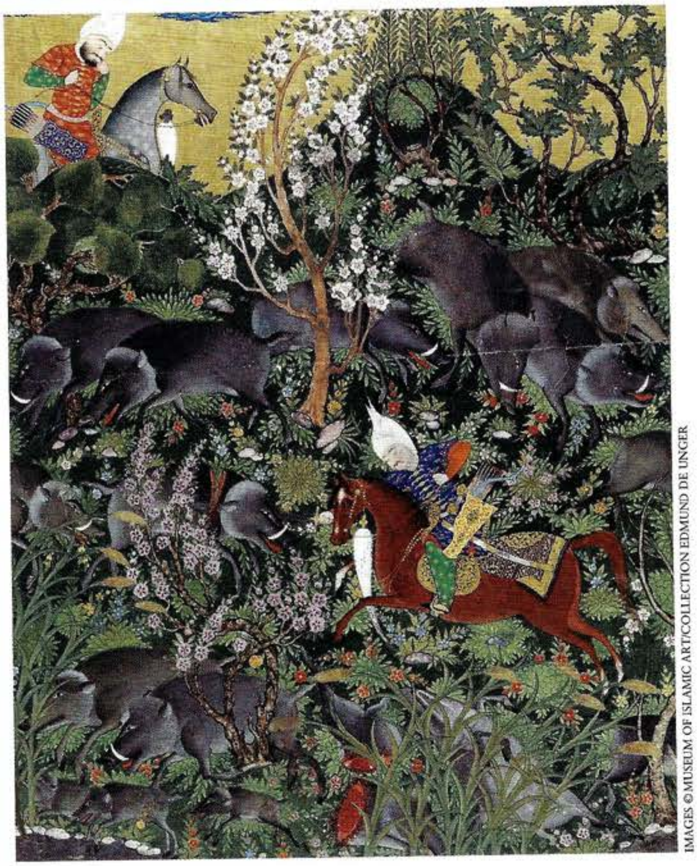


▽ De Unger was a keen collector of Fatimid rock crystal. Produced in the 10th and 11th centuries, and only at the behest of the court, Fatimid rock crystal is incredibly rare. This particularly fine example from early-11th-century Egypt, a bottle 10.7cm high, features two elegantly carved parrots perched on stylised palm trees

INGRID GESKE

◁ A large early Iznik plate, c1500. The so-called 'missing period', from 1350 to 1550, fascinated de Unger

△ The Hungarian collector was passionate about Islamic lustreware. This fabulous early-13th-century Kashan tile is a perfect example of what drew him to the art form he called 'the greatest gift the Islamic potter has made to mankind'



▷ His love of miniatures was fuelled by a childhood enchantment with *The Arabian Nights*. This detail from the *Book of Kings* depicts a wild-boar hunt in the famous manuscript of Shah Tahmasp. Iran, 1530

IMAGES © MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART/COLLECTION EDMUND DE UNGER

▽ Stefan Weber, of Berlin's Museum of Islamic Art, in the Aleppo Room

BERND WEINGARTEN

The late Edmund de Unger was one of the most important post-war period collectors of Islamic art. He amassed 1,500 *objets d'art*, from carpets and ceramics to metalwork and books, for his Keir Collection.

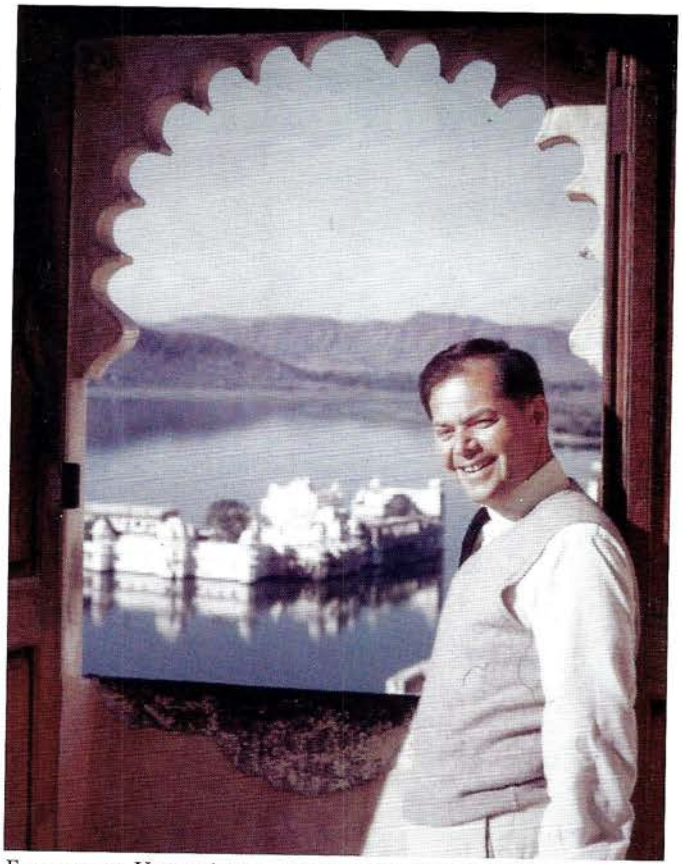
In March 2010, the Museum of Islamic Art, part of Berlin's Pergamon Museum, exhibited a small number of these works. Following de Unger's death, the fantastic collection will move in its entirety to Berlin, where it will be displayed in the new wing due to open in 2019, currently under construction.

Why Berlin? Under its young director, Stefan Weber, seen here in the Aleppo Room, right, these are the most visited galleries of Islamic art in the Western hemisphere, attracting no fewer than 600,000 visitors in 2010.

THE UNERRING EYE

THE KEIR COLLECTION WAS THE LIFE'S WORK OF THE LATE EDMUND DE UNGER, A HUNGARIAN ÉMIGRÉ WHOSE EYE FOR ISLAMIC ART WAS MATCHED BY HIS NOSE FOR A DEAL.

BY THOMAS ROUECHÉ



EDMUND DE UNGER (1918–2011), IN UDAIPUR IN THE MID-1960S

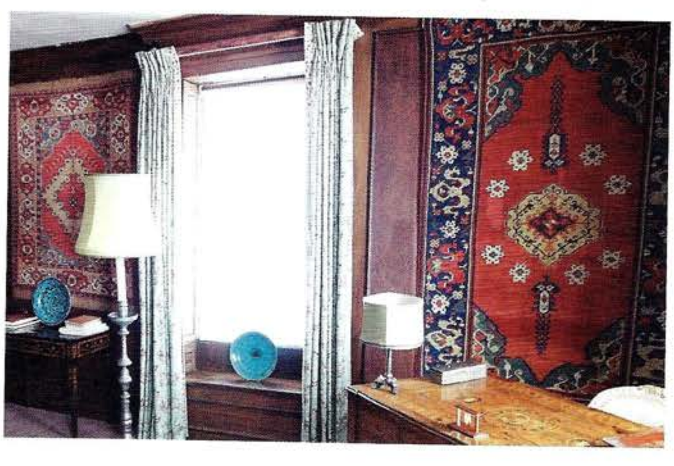
Writing in 1937, the theorist Walter Benjamin remarked that "The figure of the collector, more attractive the longer one observes it, has not been given its due attention so far. One would imagine no figure more tempting to the Romantic storytellers. The type is motivated by dangerous though domesticated passions. Yet one searches in vain among the figurines of a Hoffmann, Quincey or Nerval for that of the collector."

Perhaps no contemporary collector emblemised this more than the late Edmund de Unger – the Hungarian property developer who devoted his life to his Keir Collection of Islamic art. De Unger's life took him from the old-world Hungarian high society of the inter-war period to Oxford in the 1930s, back to war-torn, then Communist, Hungary before he finally settled in London, where he began to collect Islamic art. In 2008 he loaned 112 items to Berlin's Museum of Islamic Art for an exhibition that opened in March 2010. It was agreed that on his death the full collection of 1,500 objects would transfer to Berlin, to be housed in the Museum of Islamic Art, part of the Pergamon Museum complex.

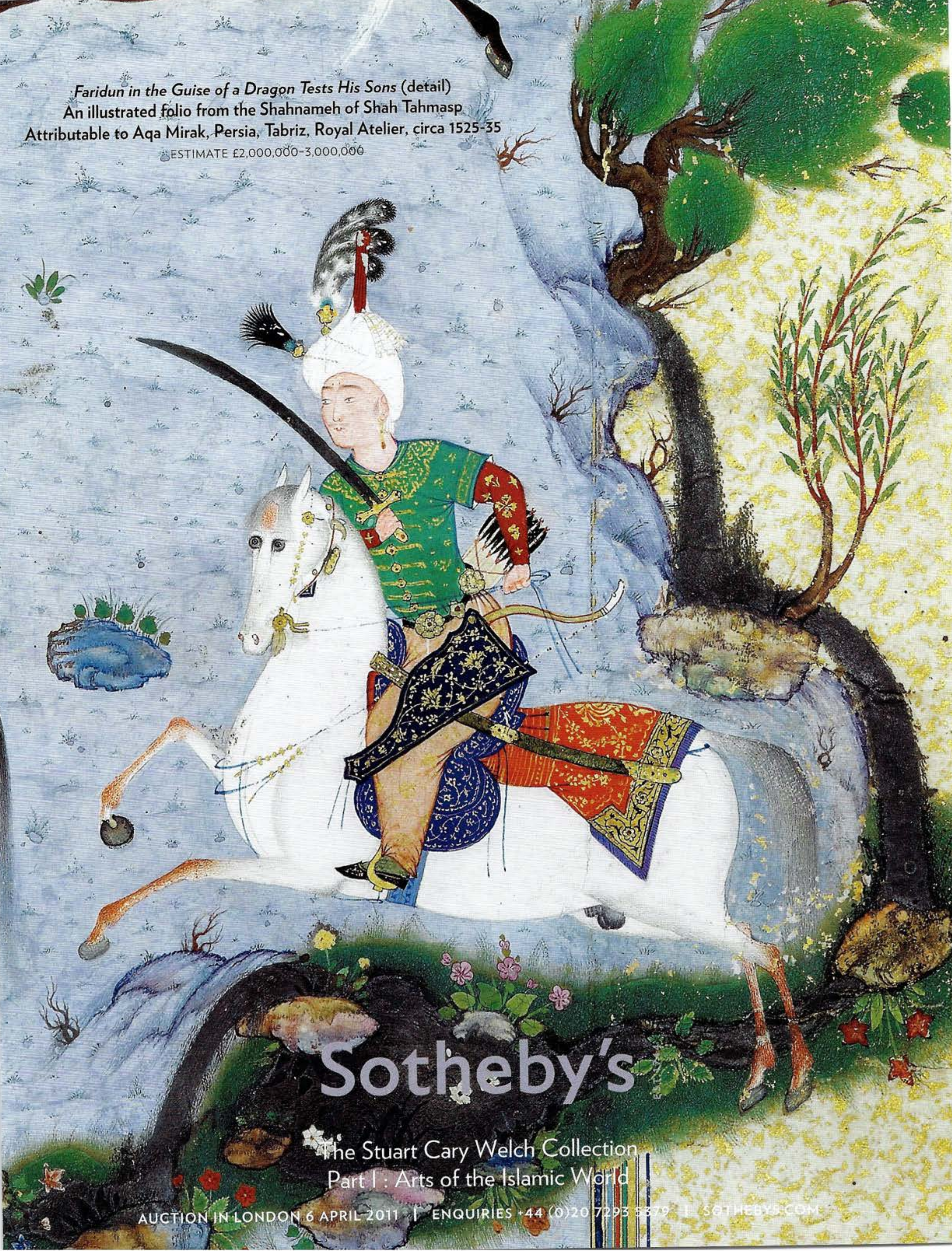
De Unger was born in Budapest in 1918 into the *haut monde* of inter-war Central Europe. After the Great War, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory in the Treaty of Trianon, but the Hungarian elite were determined to hold on to the *fin de siècle* they had enjoyed so much. The de Unger family were of old Budapest stock – counting among their ancestors the neoclassical architect Michael Pollak, designer of the Hungarian National Museum. Edmund's father, Richard de Unger, a diplomat and patron of the arts, was also a friend of the famous German academic Wilhelm von Bode, the man behind many of the museums in Berlin today.

Like many of his class at the time, Richard de Unger was a passionate collector of Oriental rugs. Edmund often recalled first becoming aware of carpets when his father told him not to walk on the precious rugs that filled the house. The de Ungers' wealth came from property: Budapest's famous Hotel Astoria was part of their considerable portfolio. Thus, when Richard died in 1928, his 10-year-old son was left, as he would recall, with "a very large fortune in real estate, paintings and carpets". His mother was also passionate about carpets and possessed a fantastic eye; after his father's death she was keen to encourage her son. But the precocious Edmund far outshone his parents. As a boy he had been taken by his father to the National Museum, where, unprompted, he accurately identified a painting by Jusepe de Ribera. At the age of 14, he stopped at a church during a Boy Scouts' bicycle tour of Romania. Sizing up a damaged carpet – a section of which had been cut off to bandage a parishioner's leg – he offered to buy the church a replacement in exchange. This rare 16th-century Turkish carpet, which in 1997 was on the floor of de Unger's bedroom, was later valued at a cool $50,000.

With his unerring eye and head for business, de Unger continued to collect carpet fragments even after going up to Hertford College, Oxford, where his "not terribly intellectual" fellow students laughed at his "moth-eaten rugs". The advent of war forced him to return to Budapest, where he managed his family's business, trying to get as many heirlooms out of the country as possible. In a quiet show of bravery and integrity during the siege of Budapest, he sheltered 22 Jews in the family home. One, Eva Spicht, would become his wife in 1945. Following the war he restored the Hotel Astoria, later nationalised by the Communist government. Much of his collection was also lost, his father's exquisite carpets being used by German and Russian



LEFT TWO PRICELESS WEST ANATOLIAN CARPETS IN DE UNGER'S LAST HOME, THE MANOR HOUSE IN HAM, SURREY. ON THE LEFT OF THE WINDOW IS A 17TH-CENTURY 'TRANSYLVANIAN' RUG, ONCE THE PROPERTY OF COUNT DOMINIC TELEKI. DE UNGER HAD LOVED THE RUG AS A YOUTH AND EVENTUALLY ACQUIRED IT FROM THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM 20 YEARS AGO, IN EXCHANGE FOR AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF HUNGARIAN SILVER. THE OTHER RUG IS A 17TH-CENTURY 'DOUBLE-NICHE' USHAK



Faridun in the Guise of a Dragon Tests His Sons (detail)
An illustrated folio from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasp
Attributable to Aqa Mirak, Persia, Tabriz, Royal Atelier, circa 1525-35
ESTIMATE £2,000,000-3,000,000

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soldiers to wrap the bodies of their war dead before burial. In the early days of the Rákosi government, de Unger, like many of the Hungarian elite, was imprisoned three times before he was allowed to emigrate. "Tell me, Edmund," an aunt asked on his release from a stint in jail, "whom did you meet this time you were in prison?"

De Unger moved to London in 1948, and after working in Ghana for the Colonial Office, turned his business acumen to his family's old profession of property management and their pastime of collecting.

The Keir Collection, named after Keir House in Wimbledon, where the de Ungers had a large flat, is undoubtedly one of the great post-war collections. De Unger began with carpets, slowly filling the apartment until the doors of the rooms no longer shut. He began to collect ceramics, with a particular interest in the so-called "missing period" from 1350 to 1550, convinced that Islamic pottery had continued to develop, despite the lack of material evidence. The Keir Collection spans textiles, metalwork, book arts, carpets and pottery, among many other things, but his foremost passion was for lustreware – "the greatest gift the Islamic potter has made to mankind".

De Unger's eye for rarity and quality shines through his acquisitions. Of particular interest is a fragment of a 12th-century Mamluk playing card, the existence of which has helped establish the history of card games in the Near East. The ceramics expert John Carswell called de Unger's collection of Fatimid lustreware "surely the finest collection in the world outside the Benaki Museum in Athens". The entire collection was published in monographs in the 1970s and '80s.

De Unger did not limit his collection to Islamic art: his interest also encompassed the Western Middle Ages, and he purchased the Ernst and Martha Kofler-Truniger collection of medieval Limoges enamels. This collection, which he sold in 1997, fell short of the $25 million estimated by Sotheby's, only bringing in $5.5 million. The pain of that disaster was no doubt assuaged by his purchase in 2008 of a Fatimid rock-crystal ewer. In a remarkable testament to his flawless eye, the ewer appeared for auction in Somerset as a "French claret jug" and sold for £220,000. By the time it reached Sotheby's that October, it was expected to reach about £10 million, but was snapped up at the reserve of £3.24 million by the sole bidder, de Unger's son, Richard, on behalf of the Keir Collection. Sotheby's later valued it at £20 million.

At the heart of his compulsion, it seems, was a love of the hunt. Whether hiding the value of a manuscript from a bookshop owner by purchasing it with a number of less interesting works, or encouraging a lady to part with an heirloom by offering her niece a job as an au pair, his view was that "collecting is like hunting, in that not only does one derive aesthetic pleasure from the objects collected but the actual pursuit is pleasurable".

It is easy to compare de Unger with the great gentleman collectors of the 19th and early 20th centuries, his father's generation. Honoré de Balzac, in *Le Cousin Pons*, described men who "walk about as if in a dream, their pockets empty, their eyes vacant of all thought… These people are millionaires. They are collectors, the most impassioned men in the world". De Unger himself felt "like someone belonging to an extinct species: the private collector who collects objects for their own sake and for his own pleasure and not for investment".

As a child, one of de Unger's favourite books was *The Arabian Nights* – one reason he gave for his love of Oriental miniatures. The image of a young boy in Budapest reading his way into another world is echoed by the Keir Collection itself, for years kept in the uncompromisingly English setting of de Unger's Manor House in Ham. With such a stylistic disjuncture, each *objet d'art* evokes a different, parallel world – a sentiment that perhaps had some meaning to an émigré from the lost world of pre-war Hungary.

In the words of those great collectors of Japanese art, the Brothers Goncourt, 19th-century collectors indulged in a passion that "gives immediate gratification from all the objects that tempt, charm, seduce: they provide a momentary abandon in aesthetic debauchery".

Edmond de Goncourt requested in his will that "those things of art which have been the joy of my life … shall not be consigned to the cold tomb of a museum…but I require that they shall all be dispersed under the hammer of the auctioneer, so that the pleasure which their acquisition has given me shall be given again…to some inheritor of my own taste". De Unger himself confessed to similar emotions. While many private collections have formed the basis of a museum (the core of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin comes from Friedrich Sarre's important collection), there remains a dichotomy: in private collections, art is lived with, but in museums it is gawked at; objects become subservient to ideas, no longer merely items of aesthetic indulgence.

Pace Goncourt, the Pergamon Museum presents the collection with its ideal home. The Islamic galleries constitute the oldest museum of Islamic art in the West. Conceived as an addition to Berlin's Museum Island by Wilhelm von Bode, the Pergamon Museum was purpose-built to house the German acquisitions from the Ottoman Empire, many of which came from find sharing on German excavations, notably the Pergamon Altar, the Ishtar Gate and the Miletus Gate. The fantastic Mshatta Façade came as a gift from Abdülhamid II to Kaiser Wilhelm II. In 2019 a massive refurbishment of the museum as a whole will be completed, and the Museum of Islamic Art will move into huge new galleries in one wing of the museum, where the Keir Collection will feature prominently.

Today it is hard for the visitor to the Pergamon Museum not to be overwhelmed with awe. The museum's antiquities are vast, showy monuments to the ancient civilisations of the Near East, gifts that bear testimony to the alliance between the Ottoman and German empires in the late 19th century. Its vast halls put paid to the snobbery of Goncourt's vision of "the cold tomb of a museum".

For Stefan Weber, the new director of the Museum of Islamic Art, it is there not to store dead objects, but to "tell people about the things they wonder about".

Trained in architectural history, Weber has lived in Beirut and Damascus. His fluency in Arabic (he also speaks some Turkish and Farsi) is matched by his ease in tackling head-on the problems that a 19th-century collection faces in an early-20th-century museum in a thoroughly modern city. His vision for the new galleries is expansive. Curatorially he places great emphasis on the key heritage of the Pergamon – "the museum was built to architecturally reflect the objects it displayed".

The Weber effect is clearly working. In 2010 the Islamic galleries attracted 600,000 visitors. Edmund de Unger chose not only the oldest but the best-visited museum of Islamic art in the western hemisphere.

In the catalogue of the Berlin exhibition in 2010, de Unger remarks that "each time I dust my Fatimid pieces I have the sensation one is in the presence of a masterpiece". John Carswell has noted that de Unger arranged his lustreware so as to catch the morning sun. As Walter Benjamin once remarked, "For a collector – and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be – ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to things. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them." It is hard not to walk the corridors of the Pergamon Museum – through the Miletus Gate or into the Aleppo Room – and not feel that here, at least, one can inhabit the objects Edmund de Unger was so lucky to live with. ◆

Thomas Roueché is a Cornucopia contributing editor. tom.roueche@gmail.com

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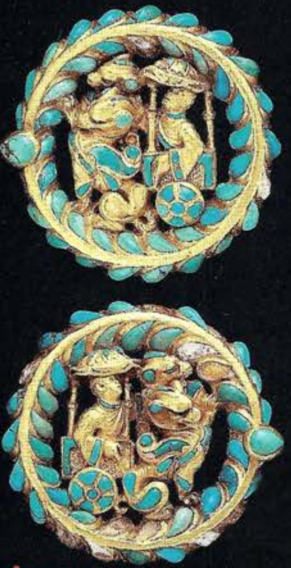
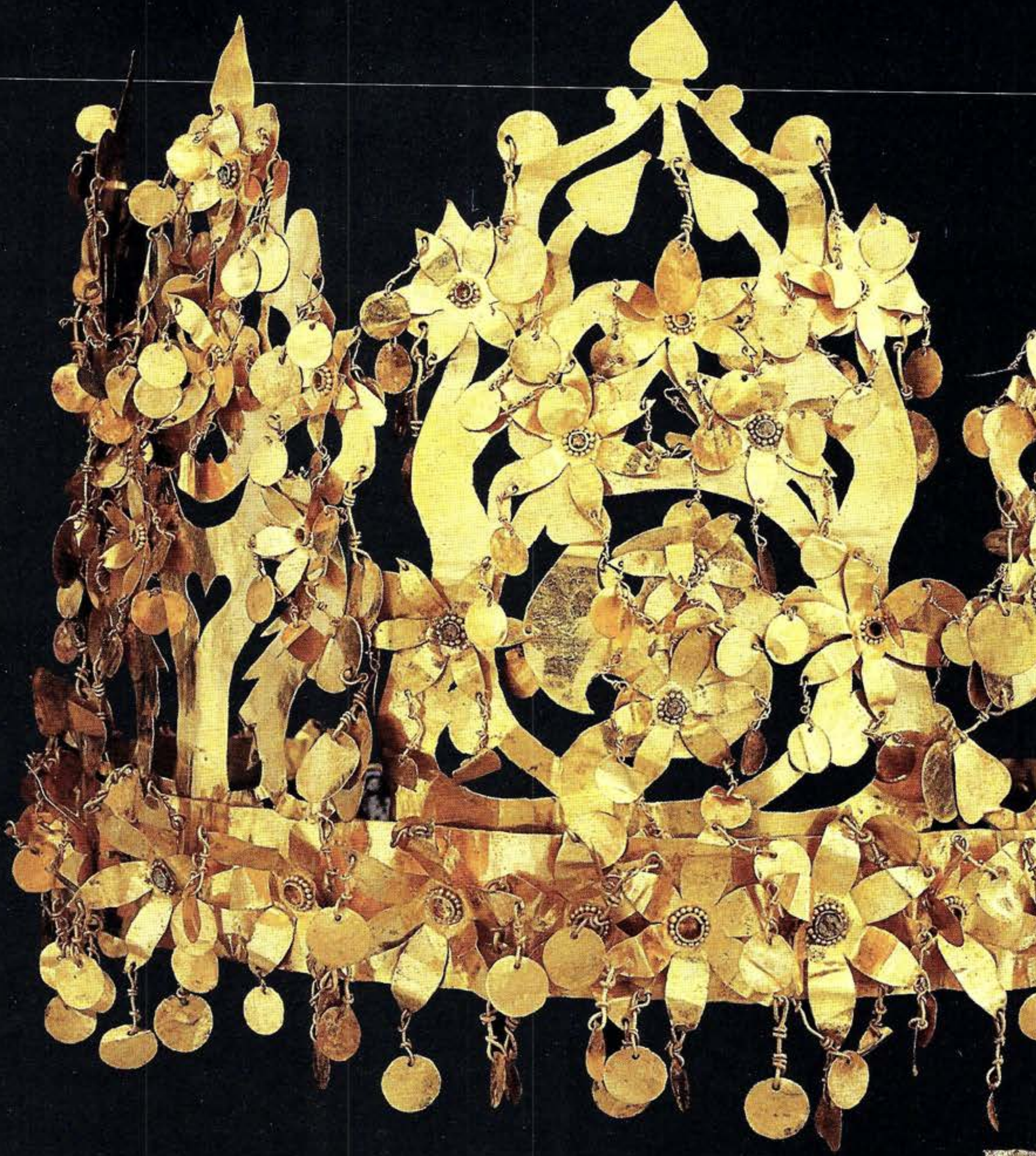
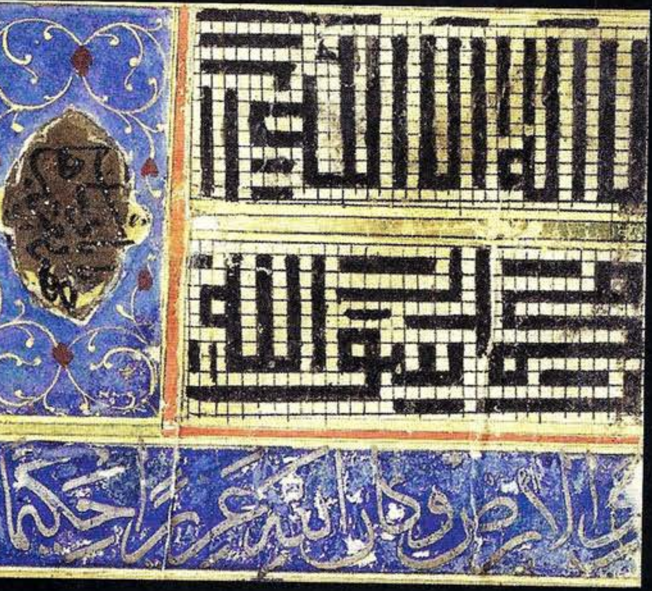


AFGHAN GOLD

An unmissable new exhibition at the British Museum (*Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World*, March 3–July 3) displays artefacts from the National Museum in Kabul ranging in date from the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD. Many were excavated from Tillya Tepe, the 'Hill of Gold', so called because of the incredible number of precious items found within.
▷ This astonishing crown from the tomb of an aristocratic female nomad is perfectly suited to a society in which wealth must be portable – it is designed to fold flat.
△ These ornaments inlaid with turquoise and carnelian are boot buckles. The motif of a chariot pulled by dragons hints at a Chinese influence. Catalogue: britishmuseumshoponline.org



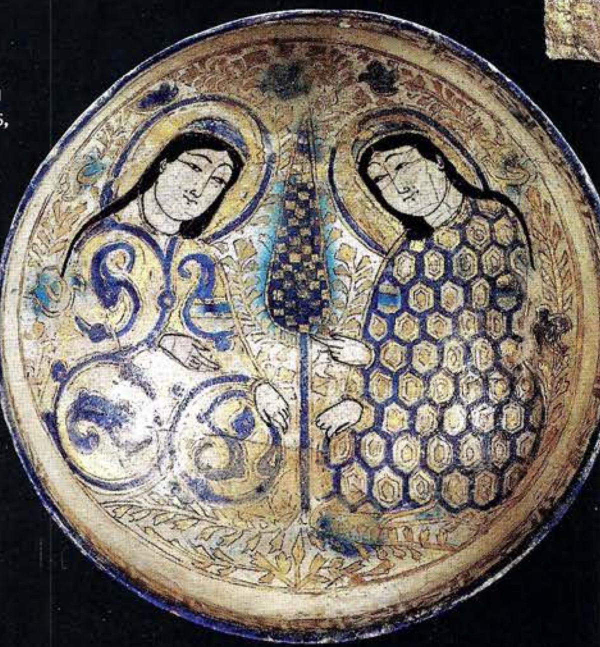


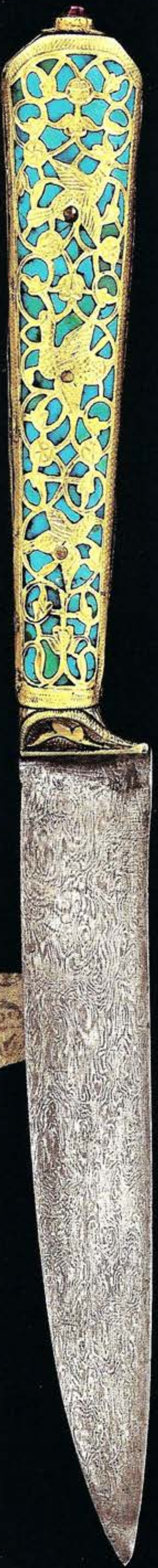
PAPERS OF POWER

◁ Among the Ottoman scrolls at Christie's Islamic and Indian sale on April 7 are *firmans*, imperial decrees, on tax collection (lot 339), aid for the poor (lot 347) and grandees' appointments (lots 338 and 345). More intriguing is a scroll tracing the lineage of Mustafa III (r.1757–74) back to the Prophet (lot 349). Most precious is this 16th-century talismanic scroll (lot 296, est £20–30,000) just 10cm high but five metres long

GLORIOUS GOWNS

▷ The designer of this beautiful 13th-century Persian bowl has had fun forming the gowns of the two moon-faced, haloed figures out of twisting palmettes on the left, and a honeycomb pattern on the right. Sotheby's Arts of the Islamic World, lot 316, est £30–50,000





CUTTING EDGE

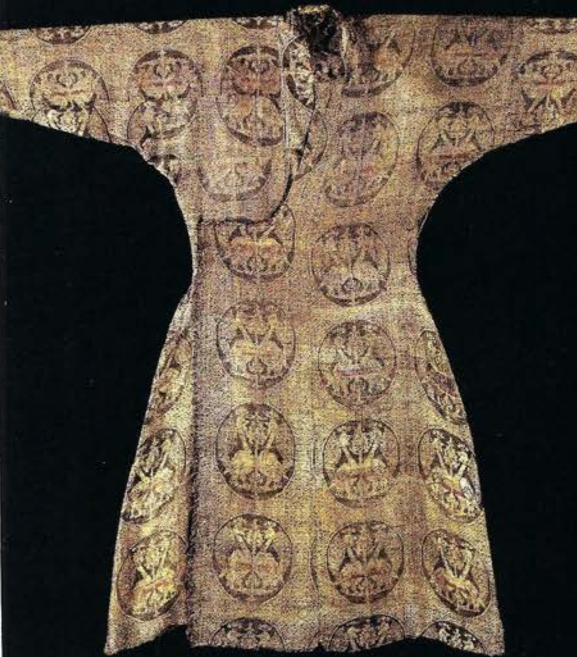
▷ The undoubted star of the Christie's Islamic and Indian sale on April 7, this knife, made in 16th-century Istanbul (lot 300, est £400–600,000), is an exquisite example of the jeweller's craft. Even sultans had to beg the Safavid Shah for turquoise of this quality, which came from his mines at Nishapur. Unlike inferior turquoise, which discolours with heat, both in the making and in use, Nishapur's was heat-resistant.

The handle gives the illusion of being made from solid gold inset with stone; in fact it is a continuation of the steel blade and has been wrapped in a layer of gold, which secures the finely cut pieces of turquoise. Very few such items have come down to us; unsurprisingly, all have royal provenance.

SELJUK SILK

▽ Like the much earlier Afghan crown, left, this 11th-century Seljuk silk robe from Central Asia (Sotheby's Arts of the Islamic World, April 6, lot 314, est £300–500,000) represents wealth that was worn rather than hoarded. The motif of repeating roundels enclosing confronting peacocks places it within a rare group of early textiles made across an area from Byzantium to Beijing

Reports by William Greenwood
bgreenwood@cornucopia.net

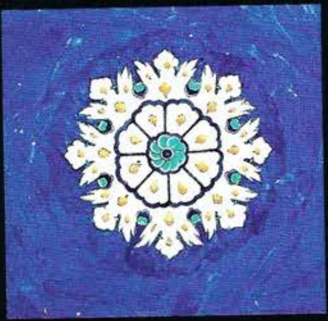


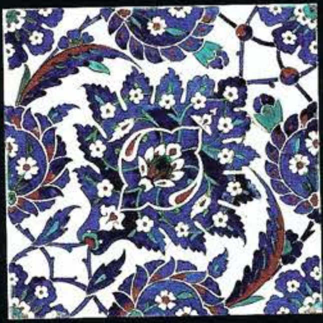
RHAPSODIES IN BLUE

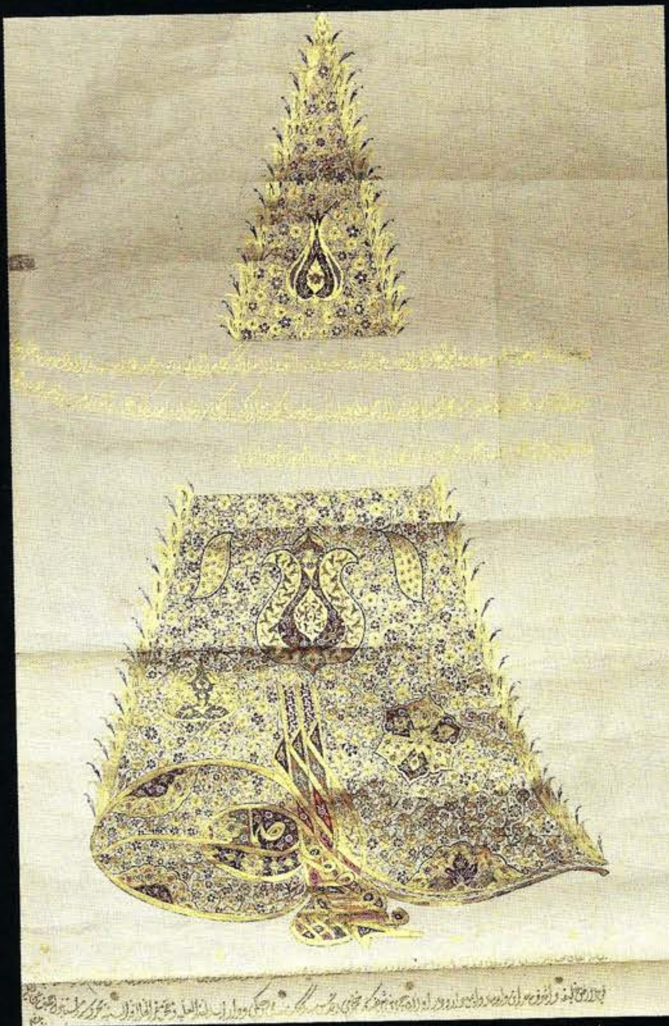
▽ Two very different Iznik tiles come to auction in London's Islamic sales this spring. On April 6, Sotheby's has the striking abstract Iznik tile below, from c1560 (lot 438, est £20–30,000). It originally separated verses in a set of calligraphic panels; the contrasting cobalt and white would have made it visible from a distance. The handsome floral tile below right, c1570, at Christie's on April 7 (lot 113, est £6–8000), is more decorative, with swirling saz leaves and stylised flowers on a white ground and hints of the tomato red of later Iznik.

THE SULTAN'S SEAL

▽ ▽ Combining historical import and aesthetic appeal, a *firman* bearing the *tuğra*, or cypher, of Mehmed IV is expected to reach £100–150,000 at Sotheby's on April 6 (lot 328). Dated 1680, it sets out a treaty between the Ottomans and the Dutch. The sumptuous ornamentation – in the form of a cypress tree – is proof of the document's significance







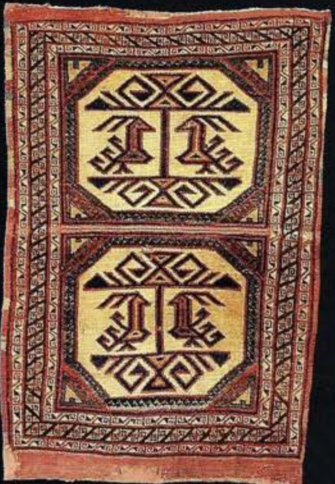
SILKEN GARDEN

▷ This large wedding embroidery from the Central Asian city of Bokhara, dates to about 1850. It is one of the rare Uzbek suzanis – hangings or covers with colourful silk floral embroidery – to be exhibited by Anthony Hazledine at the inaugural London Antique Rug and Textile Art Fair (LARTA) (March 31 – April 3).

LARTA aims to fill the gap left by the demise of the Hali Fair. Although on a much smaller scale, it has attracted a list of established textile and carpet dealers. With its emphasis on the decorative aspects of textiles, the fair will appeal both to aficionados and to a new generation of textile lovers. For information see www.larta.net

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

△ The iconic 'Marby' rug, with its ageless pan-Eurasian design of octagons containing stylised birds facing a tree, is attributed to Anatolia and has been carbon-dated to the 14th century. Closely related to the famous Berlin 'Dragon and Phoenix' rug, it was bought in 1925 by the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm for 1000 krona (about £100) from the church in Marby, a small parish on Lake Storsjön in northern Sweden.



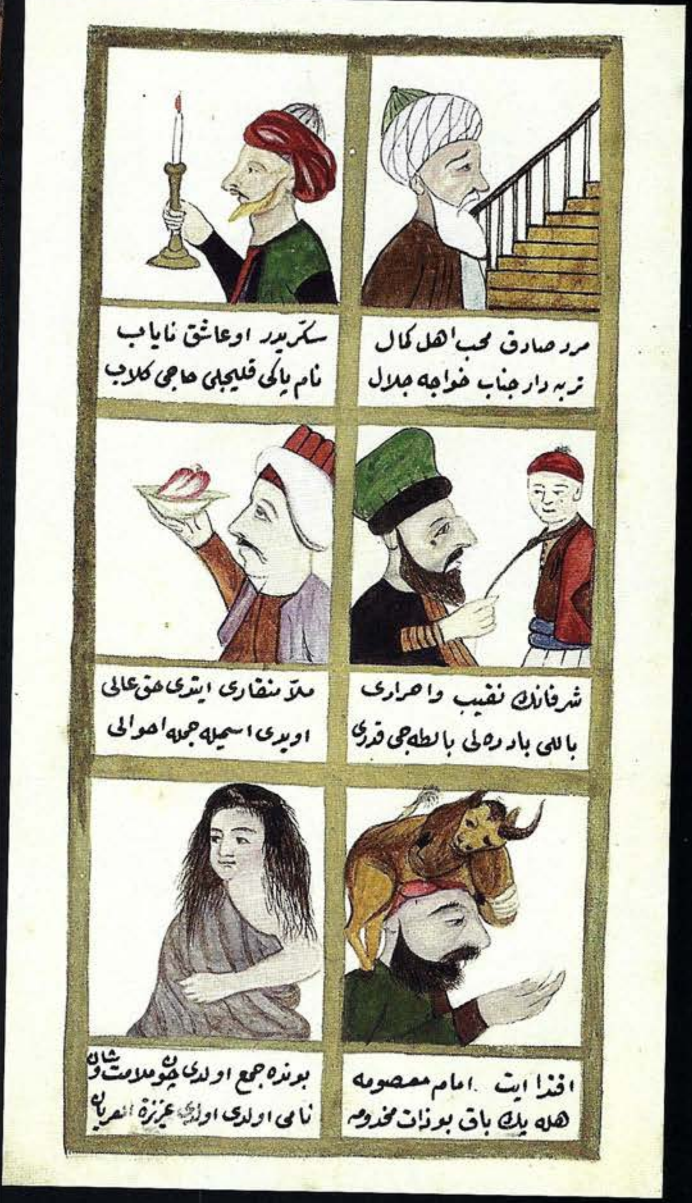
It is one of many beautiful and historically significant carpets and textiles – including Queen Kristina's Safavid velvet coat – in an exhibition at the Royal Armoury in Stockholm. This show will be specially mounted for participants in the 12th International Conference on Oriental Carpets (ICOC XII), June 16–19.

The ICOC event boasts loaned exhibitions of antique Oriental and Scandinavian weavings, as well as a commercial fair. Before and after the conference there will also be carpet- and textile-focused tours to Copenhagen and St Petersburg. www.icoc2011stockholm.se

A 2000-YEAR-OLD KILM

◁ Lot 100 at Christie's London sale of Oriental Rugs and Carpets on April 5 is a truly rare and fascinating item – a sophisticated Inner Asian woollen flatweave from a culture and time close to that of the famous Pazyryk burials in the Altai Mountains. Carbon-dated to 360–180 BC but in remarkable condition, with complex patterning and well-preserved colours, the 'kilim' was acquired in Kathmandu in the early 1990s

Textile reports by Daniel Shaffer, daniel.shaffer@hali.com


مرد صادق محب اهل کمال
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اویدی اسمیله جمله احوالی
افندا ایت . امام معصومه
هله یك باق بو ذات مخدومه
بونده جمع اولدی چون ملامت و شان
نامی اولدی اولیا عزیزه العریان

OTTOMAN CURIOSITIES

△ Christie's has just the thing for connoisseurs of Ottoman oddities: an 1858 treatise on fortune-telling illustrated with charming miniatures. Topics include divination, the Mahdi, the Hamzawiyyah order of Sufis and the end of time (April 7, lot 368, est £3–4000).

▽ This is one of a set of 19th-century Delft tiles made for English fireplaces. The Turkish figures are from Nicolas de Nicolay's 1568 *Navigations et pérégrinations orientales* (Sotheby's, April 6, lot 411, est £5–7000)

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Polychrome, underglaze-painted, stoneware Iznik plate.
Photograph by Fritz von der Schulenburg

BOOKS

PHILIP MANSEL'S ODE TO THE LEVANT, NORMAN STONE ON TURKEY FROM FIRST TO LAST, ROBERT BYRON ON MOUNT ATHOS, JAMES BALDWIN'S ISTANBUL YEARS, THE JOYS OF ROUGH TRAVEL

LIFTING THE LID ON THE LEVANT

Jason Goodwin

LEVANT: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean

By Philip Mansel
John Murray, £25

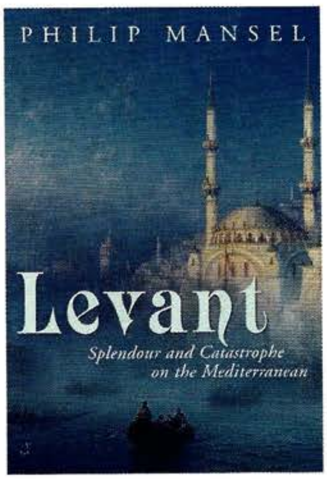
Readers of CORNUCOPIA will be delighted with Philip Mansel's long-awaited return to the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, whose imperial capital he explored so brilliantly in *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire*. His latest book, *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe*, focuses on three less imperial cities, with a sideways glance at Thessalonika: cities on the edge of the Ottoman Empire in which a hybrid society arose to channel trade.

Izmir, Beirut and Alexandria were always going to be important ports: Izmir, or Smyrna, was the entrepôt of Asia Minor in the days of Herodotus, who was born there; Alexandria was a colossus of the classical world; Beirut's own history is Phoenician. What gave them – and Constantinople, too – a twist was Ottoman rule, and a foreign policy which opened up these cities to foreign trade and settlement.

Religious tolerance in the Ottoman Empire stands in attractive contrast to the intransigence of contemporary Christian Europe, though in effect the Ottomans had little choice but to regulate the affairs of non-Muslim minorities through their religious leaders, the so-called *millet* system. After the Ottoman conquest of Istanbul, the Venetians in the empire were placed under a *bailo*, who continued a practice established in Byzantine times of representing, protecting and regulating his countrymen. In 1569 a more extensive version of the Venetian arrangement, with 18 articles, or *capitulae*, was granted to the French. The new agreement gave them freedom of commerce, of dress and worship; it exempted them from Ottoman tax and forced labour, and subjected them to their own laws, exercised through the consul, in all matters except murder. Similar "capitulations" were later made with the English and the Dutch, and they established the framework of the Levantine world for the next three centuries.

As all the Dutch impedimenta of modern trade – interest, loans and the like – came onstream, the wisdom of exempting the merchants from sharia law became obvious. The fortune-hunters arrived and prospered. The foreign consuls – French, Dutch and English – in Smyrna lived like princes, their merchants like lords. Trade boomed. Jews moved in from the Mediterranean diaspora; the Greeks poured in, especially after the War of Independence. By the 19th century Izmir's population of half a million was roughly divided between Muslim Turks and the Orthodox, Jewish and Western Europeans. The churches rose beside the mosques, a dozen languages were spoken on the street, and a gilded café society propped up by the usual 19th-century panoply of newspapers flourished along the Cordon, which flanked the sea.

Something similar occurred in Alexandria, after Mehmed Ali took control. He and his heirs presided over an explosion of foreign trade. This city, too, was predominantly Greek, and it survived into the age of jazz and scandal. The British took Alexandria in 1882, with Gladstone arranging his own atrocities on Ottoman soil: Mansel considers it a crime, but it kept the party going for another 70 years. Beirut, not coincidentally, was a largely French affair, managed down to our own times by a spluttering clockwork of communal checks and balances.



Whatever the official status of these Levantine ports, it is fair to describe them, in their heyday, as city states. They were not melting-pots, quite: Levantines could share a common interest in trade, and managerial values; they could send their children to be educated in the schools that sprang up to receive them – Victoria College, in Alexandria, was the Eton of the Levant – but they were never bound to an overarching ideal, and there was often another home for them – the Benakis in Athens, or the Barkers in England – to where they could run in times of trouble, or to whom they could appeal for aid and intervention.

In Alexandria Cavafy could write about homosexual love with a freedom that other European writers might have envied, but as the poet of nostalgia it was always the Greek millennia he mourned, set to end for his own city within 30 years of his death. Waiting for the barbarians did not mean troubling to learn their language, at least for Cavafy and his fellow Alexandrines, who preferred French to Arabic.

Yet if there were limits to the *convivencia*, it did constitute a unique society, for in no other cities in the world did Muslims, Christians and Jews live together for so long. For Ottomans, foreign travel was awkward and restricted: the ports were windows onto the West, freer than Istanbul, freer for rich foreigners than their own metropolitan centres.

The struggle between Greek and Turkish armies for control of Anatolia between 1919 and 1922 brought the whole system crashing down, and defined the terms by which Turkey would become a nation. The city states were caught in the riptide of 20th-century nationalism. Greek Smyrna ended in days of bloody violence, with 300,000 refugees desperately crowding onto the Cordon, begging the foreign ships to take them off. While they waited, preyed on by Turkish troops, the Greek area of the city burned. The Greek government was reluctant to help, and British and American warships had to wait for days before they received orders to evacuate the people.

It was a political decision to bring an end to Greek involvement in the region, followed in 1923 by the exchange of populations. Alexandria remained cosmopolitan, and subject to German air raids in the Second World War, but the status of its "foreign" population, like that of the king, who mingled with it, grew precarious. Egyptian nationalism swept the country after the Suez affair, and Nasser took control of the commerce, with predictable results. Ultimately the Eastern Mediterranean's Jewish communities were undermined by the establishment of Israel, which joined forces with the various nationalists to drive them out.

Mansel draws us into the fascinating detail of fascinating lives as they were led in the Levantine cities: the parties, the prejudices, the higher politics. *Levant* brings second helpings of the treats he dished out in *Constantinople*, exercising the same gift for narrative, detail and analysis. He has mined the voluminous records, travelled and interviewed, to write what will remain for years to come the most authoritative and readable history of the Levantine world.

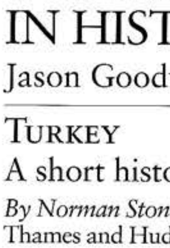
TOP MARKS IN HISTORY

Jason Goodwin

TURKEY

A short history

By Norman Stone
Thames and Hudson, £16.95



A nation's history is a grand and solemn thing, and the danger is that it will be borne to the national catafalque to the sound of bugles and the broken two-step. Widows snuffle into their shawls, greybeards shake their heads, while the eyes of the young shine with memories of bright victories and defeats. Someone, in conclusion, may intone, "And so…" or merely, "Whither next?"

This is not at all how Norman Stone approaches the history of Turkey, which has certainly had its share of artful drapes and slow marches. Instead he sees it as something of a lively debate, in which even taxi drivers nowadays participate. There is an Islamic party behaving by the rules, like European Christian Democrats, overseeing a vibrant and expanding mixed economy, and if it isn't quite Luxembourg it certainly isn't Iran either. Why not? Some of those new EU countries lack its heft, and much of its charm. So solemnity is all very well, but we do better to ask questions and figure out how the contraption works.

Stone has six questions to ask of Turkish history, which take us back to the very earliest movements of the Turkish tribes. From the beginning, Turkish ventures tended to be successful, as they muscled their way off the steppe and into the grander purlieus of the Middle East, learning all the way. First came Islam, and then – as they came up against the Byzantines – the Turks learnt statecraft. Finally they took over the moribund Greek empire and made it work. Under Selim the Grim they aimed higher yet, and achieved world empire. Then something went wrong in the Mediterranean and the parties concerned retreated into mysticism; the Ottomans lost their capacity to adapt. The scribes and mullahs were allowed to get away with squeezing out the printing press and destroying the observatory, while ladies in harems, not soldiers on battlefields, decided the issues. Stone later outlines the surprising rise of football in republican Turkey; he admires good managers.

The first 10 sultans were just that. Later sultans relied on hiring talent, which they did quite well for a time, until the talent was wasted on palace management rather than imperial service. Lost in a haze of court politics, the Ottomans lost ground literally and figuratively, and most significantly to the Russians; Selim the Grim was not unlike his coeval Ivan the Terrible, but later Russia got Peter while the Ottomans got a gaggle of nonentities, a state of affairs which lasted to the reign of Selim III. It was Mahmud II who finally did what Peter had done a century before. It was mostly too late, with Egypt gone, the Russians affirming their position as the last great steppe empire, and foreigners fulminating about the Greeks.

All this is explored with energy and pungent wit: Stone's observations are constantly exhilarating, and he is particularly good on the Tanzimat and the extinguishing of the empire, which had become too rotten to manage at all. Stone has sympathy for *anciens régimes*, and understands them better than any historian alive, but the sympathy is chiefly aesthetic; one reads Proust for many reasons but not to revive the Third Republic. Every nation's path is strewn with tares, but of course the right thing to do with nettles is to grasp them, as intelligently as possible. Atatürk did so, and Stone rightly identifies his language reform of 1928 as the essential reason why Turkey has prospered since.

However many histories of Turkey you have read, you will never have read one as incisive, combative and sure-footed as this one, which is also delightfully brisk and extremely funny. Stone gives Turkey a good alpha minus, which may not be the top mark, quite, but certainly puts it ahead of the class.

Jason Goodwin is the author of the award-winning 'Yashim' detective series, set in 1830s Istanbul. The fourth adventure, 'An Evil Eye', is now on sale

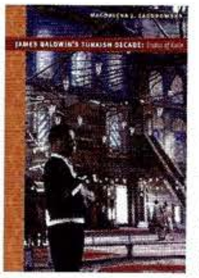
BALDWIN'S ISTANBUL

Anna Özbek

JAMES BALDWIN'S TURKISH DECADE

Erotics of Exile

By Magdalena J Zaborowska
Duke University Press, $24.95



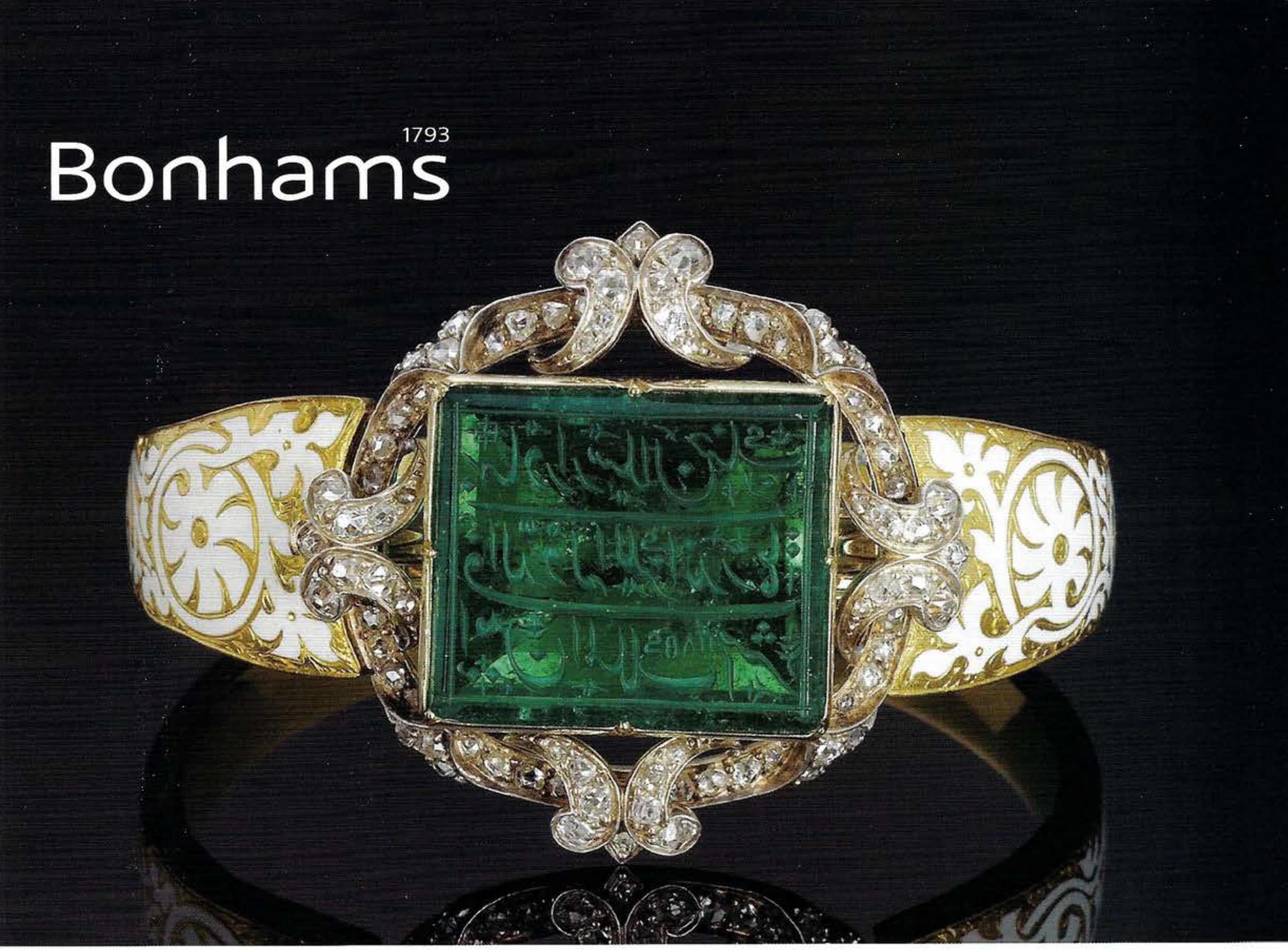
As James Baldwin regains his rightful place among the giants of American literature, a new eye is being cast upon the importance of his often ignored later works. A Pentecostal preacher turned writer turned civil-rights activist, James Baldwin loudly challenged (and still challenges) established notions of race and sexuality. Unable to live in a country where he was ostracised for these positions, Baldwin would spend the majority of his life in self-imposed exile in France, Switzerland and Turkey.

Magdalena Zaborowska's *Erotics of Exile* offers a meticulous account and analysis of Baldwin's years in Turkey and their previously unexplored effects on his work. Combining personal anecdotes and excerpts from Baldwin's work, Zaborowska deftly captures the essence of the man, and its inextricable link to the characters and themes in his writings.

The narrative begins with Baldwin's acceptance of the invitation of his close friend, the famous Turkish actor Engin Cezzar, to stay and write, undisturbed, in Istanbul. Though he had laboured over *Another Country*, his third novel, for almost 10 years, upon arrival in Istanbul Baldwin was able to complete it in a mere two months. Surrounded by a colourful cast of Istanbullus, we travel alongside his emotionally tumultuous life as he directs Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* for the Turkish stage, completes the essay collection *No Name in the Street* and begins his final work, *The Welcome Table*. Despite his lack of Turkish and frequent references to him as the *Arap*, Baldwin felt comfortable in the simultaneous celebrity and anonymity Istanbul allowed him, while the clarity afforded by distance allowed him to gain insight into his homeland.

Although attention to detail is one of the text's strengths, Zaborowska's tendency to overanalyse the comments of her interviewees can become tiring. Nevertheless, this detracts little from an otherwise successful book, delightfully peppered with previously unpublished photographs, which, like the anecdotes to which they correspond, act as a spyglass through which to observe Baldwin.

The text's importance to both Baldwin studies and American literature notwithstanding, its greater significance lies in its exploration of national and supranational identity. In his own words, exile "saved my life… [by making me] able and willing to accept [my] own vision of the world, no matter how radically this vision departs from that of others." Words that should resonate with all expatriates, regardless of origin or destination.



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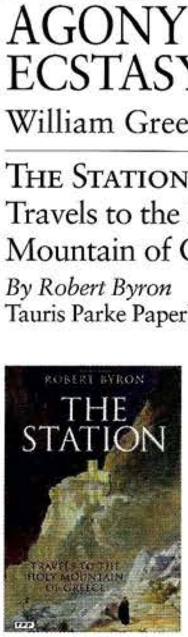
ATHOS: AGONY AND ECSTASY

William Greenwood

THE STATION
Travels to the Holy Mountain of Greece

By Robert Byron
Tauris Parke Paperbacks, £11.99



Robert Byron is a hard man to pin down. How to label him? Travel writer? Art historian? Bright Young Thing? A reissue of his 1927 travelogue *The Station*, with a new foreword by Christopher Sykes, his travel partner in Persia and Afghanistan, shows him to be all of the above and more. This account of his second visit to Mount Athos, the holiest site in Orthodoxy, combines political, religious and art history with a lively travelogue and cutting wit. Fortified by saddlebags laden with Fortnum & Mason chicken in aspic and tinned salmon, Byron and his companions for this particular journey, Mark Ogilvie-Grand and David Talbot Rice (whom he describes as a "cenotaph of competence, monolith of equanimity"), spent a summer exploring this "station of a faith where all the years have stopped".

Inevitably, *The Station* will be compared to his acknowledged classic, *The Road to Oxiana* (1937), in which he seeks the Central Asian roots of Islamic architecture. In many ways *The Station* is a precursor to *Oxiana*, demonstrating that Byron had already developed a knack for the mixture of Waugh-esque snappiness and art-historical lyricism he would later develop to such fine effect. *The Station* is not, as Bruce Chatwin so forcefully described *Oxiana*, "a sacred text, beyond criticism". However, it is essential reading for anyone interested in the development of Byron's oeuvre, and given the influence which Byron had on those who followed in his footsteps, from Chatwin to William Dalrymple, *The Station* can be seen as a key text in the development of modern travel writing. The reader already acquainted with his later works might be left with a sense of *déjà vu* by certain passages, such as the dialogue with a Turkish customs officer which occurs early on in the narrative.

The book has flaws, not the least of which is the author's subjecting the reader to an endless flow of frankly superfluous information on the ins and outs of the last thousand years of Athonite history. Obviously a degree of background knowledge is essential, but this occasionally reads more like notes for an undergraduate lecture than a travelogue – although perhaps we should not be surprised by this, given that Byron had only recently graduated from Oxford. He himself recognised this problem and writes in his own defence that "if patches are purpled with the past... let the reader recall his own schoolroom and discover the excuse".

As with all of Byron's works, the reader is regularly subjected to the violence of both his passions and his prejudices: Sykes notes in his new introduction that Byron's "pugnacity and his unreflecting optimism destroy so much of the value of the criticism". At times his obsessions are taken too far: his claims to detect an affinity between the Potala in Lhasa, Simopetra in Athos and the modernist architecture of the 1920s, for instance, leave much to be desired in their logic. On the other hand, he occasionally produces prose of such wonderful clarity that it can be placed alongside the great art-historical works of the 20th century. His description of the frescoes in the chapel of St George is at least the equal of his famed description of the Gunbad-i Qabus in *Oxiana*, and are worth the price of the book alone: "Let him who still conceives of Byzantine painting as a hieratic degradation, imagine a Giotto unsweetened, as Giotto already was, by Italianate naturalism, painting in the luminous colours of El Greco – those cold blues and clarets, olive-shadowed yellows, and pure, clear greens of under the sea; lit with angry brilliance; geometric in form; yet in austerity sympathetic, in power gentle."

In *The Station* Byron comes across as an altogether more pleasant individual than in *Oxiana*. At no point does he resort to physical violence – perhaps because here he is in the holiest place, the only living remnant of his beloved Byzantium, rather than from any lingering youthful kindness. On this occasion it is Talbot Rice, the great Byzantinist, who ruffles feathers, nonchalantly smashing the locks on a chapel door when denied access.

As with his other travel books, current events cannot help but enter into his discussion of vanished empires and exquisite art. *First Russia, Then Tibet* (1933) criticised Stalinism at a time when its horrors were less apparent, while *Oxiana* dealt, albeit obliquely, with the shifting power politics of the Middle East and Central Asia. Behind the architectural marvels and picturesque monks of *The Station* is a portrait of a world in flux, left reeling from the awful aftershocks of nationalism, revolution and the collapse of empire. The apparently impregnable and unchanging mountain is shown as suffering from the Balkan Wars, the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the disastrous Greek campaign in Anatolia. The sheer amount of outside interference in this holy place is breathtaking, and largely unknown outside academic circles. How astonishing it is to learn that in 1913 the preaching of a mystically minded monk led to the landing of Russian troops there, or that the Greek dictator Pangalos considered turning the mountain into, of all things, a casino.

Byron is gratifyingly even-handed when it comes to the people involved in these periodical upheavals, and he is fully aware that the Ottomans, far from oppressing this stronghold of Eastern Christianity, did a far better job of maintaining it than the modern Greeks. In a section on the capture of the mountain in 1912, he allows the Turkish *kaymakam* to present the Ottoman case eloquently: "Always the West is talking of Turkish fanaticism. But what race, I ask you, what conqueror could have treated these people with greater humanity, greater moderation, greater religious tolerance? ... They will regret us, monsieur."

As a dip into a closed world; as an enjoyable diatribe against moribund good taste and received wisdom; as exquisite vignettes of a golden summer with friends, *The Station*, imperfect as it is, fulfils all of these descriptions. To paraphrase John Updike on Nabokov, Byron wrote about travel the only way it should be written – ecstatically.

ROUGH RIDES

Christopher Trillo

JAUNDICED IN IN ANTALYA
Mountaineering and Misadventures in Pre-tourist Turkey and Afghanistan

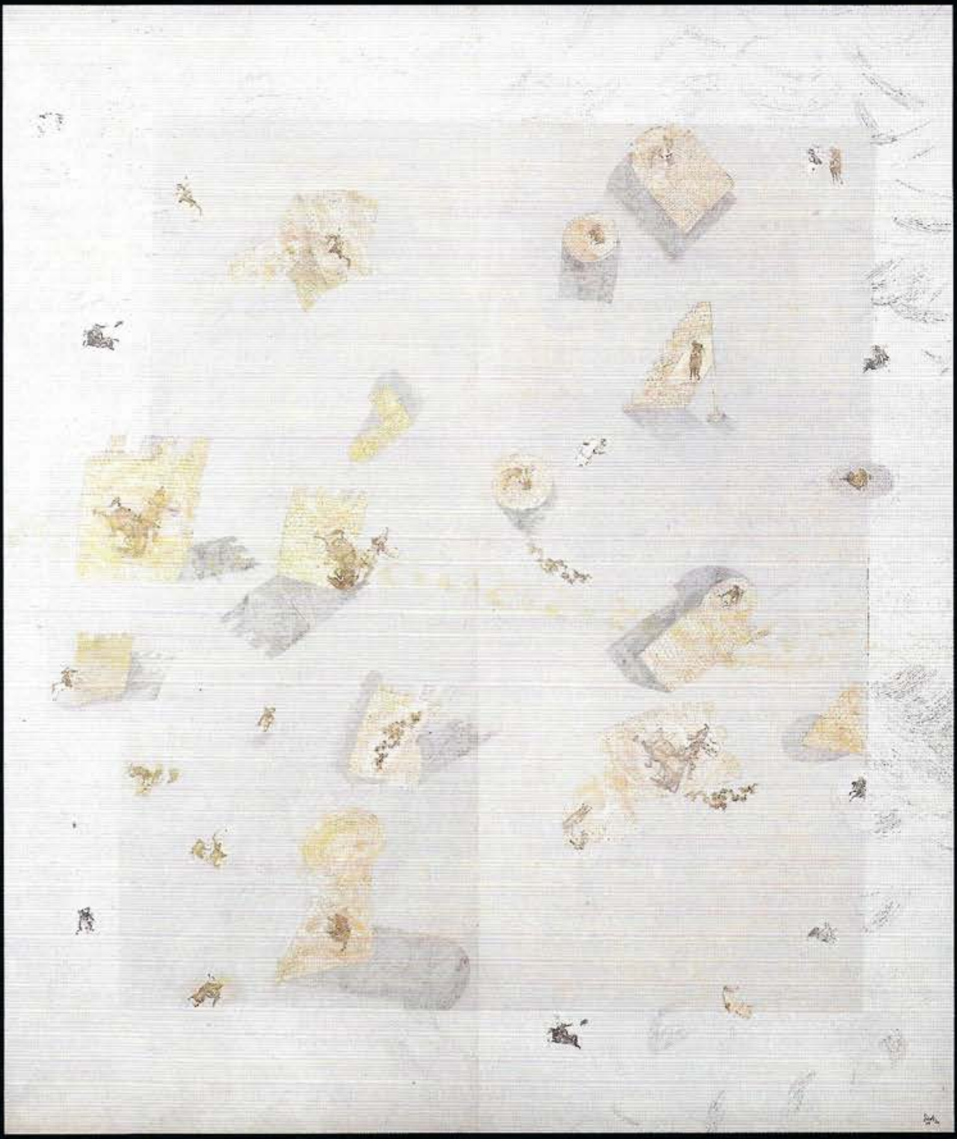
By Frances Oliver
Perron Press, £9.99

UPS AND DOWNS ALONG THE BLACK SEA COAST
In the reverse footsteps of Xenophon

By Penny Young
Twopenny Press, £12.95

Reading travel accounts, one sometimes questions why the travellers struggle on against all odds with such little apparent enjoyment – and then declare their great love for the places and people visited. It is one of life's essential paradoxes that difficulties are more engaging than successes. They are certainly easier to write about, as these books testify, and make for more interesting reading. After all, there is nothing so pleasurable as other people's misery, except perhaps one's own recollected in tranquillity.

The most striking lesson to be taken from these books is the



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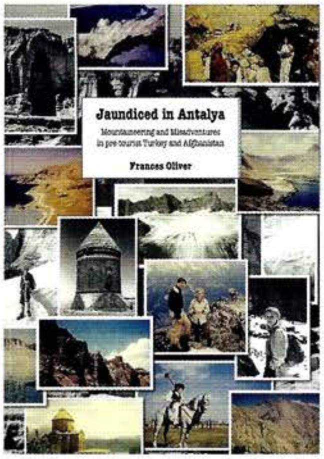
elusiveness and brevity of joy and the inevitability and duration of misfortune. This is evident even from their titles. Both Frances Oliver and Penny Young find it hard to write more than a few happy paragraphs at a time, swiftly following them with pages of satisfyingly detailed disgruntlement.

In other respects the books differ greatly. Frances Oliver writes of her first ventures in Asian travel with her partner, Dux Schneider, in the 1960s. The book reads as a diary, sparse and episodic, of a year's travelling and climbing, mainly in Turkey, with a brief trip to Afghanistan and a period of sickness and recuperation in Antalya. This is interspersed with material from other sources and her own commentary, added some 40 years later.

Oliver captures the innocence, uncertainty and slight paranoia of the novice traveller. She lists the massive quantities of equipment and supplies (including 30 bars of Kendal Mint Cake) packed into their Land Rover. What follows is an account of an inauspicious introduction to Turkey and its culture, which nevertheless formed the basis of a deep and lasting relationship. In the process we gain an insight into the passionate nature of Dux, and his frequently turbulent relationship with the writer and the rest of the world.

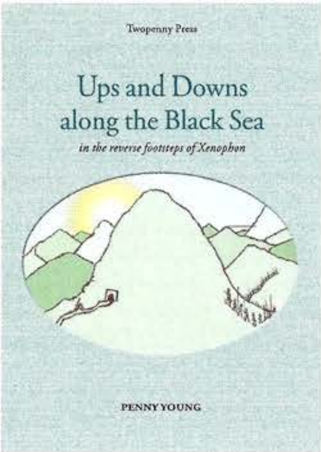
Oliver tells of a series of largely frustrated attempts to find fellow mountaineers, money transfers, official and unofficial assistance and suitable mountains to climb. We are taken on a tour of remote locations in eastern Turkey and given a picture of unchanged lifestyles among its villages and nomadic groups. The pair's interactions with these people, the inevitable misunderstandings and occasional affirmations of shared humanity, form the narrative of the book. Oliver describes how the hospitality of "the almost aggressively friendly Turks" can overwhelm the will of their guests. There are frequent passages that will resonate with any traveller in rural Anatolia. One painful episode concerns an oppressive and antagonistic guide – or, more accurately, guard – who contrives to obstruct, starve and isolate the couple as they trek through the mountains of Hakkâri in search of a good peak to climb.


Jaundiced in Antalya
Mountaineering and Misadventures in pre-tourist Turkey and Afghanistan
Frances Oliver

In contrast, parts of the tour are celebrations of the bounty and beauty of nature and the blessings of simple human kindness. There are idyllic evocations of mountain-top panoramas, Side on the Mediterranean and Band-i-Amir in the Hindu Kush. Oliver excels at creating cameos, relating snippets of conversation with a fleeting cast of extras: the drunken, self-pitying Pakistani businessman; the intrusive probing of the nomadic women; the villagers' poignant and misplaced faith in their guests' medical skills. There are moments of comedy: the Afghan border guard perusing their passports upside down; Nigel, their travelling companion, eliciting the unwanted affections of a police chief. The overall impression, however, remains one of recurrent pain, frustration and discomfort described in well-observed detail, like a lover taking pride in the details of a stormy relationship.

Jaundiced in Antalya is a fascinating patchwork of scenes from rural Turkey before the huge changes which were soon to overtake the country. Equally absorbing is the picture of a young woman struggling to maintain her own and her partner's objectives in an alien and intractable world.

This powerful subtext also runs through Penny Young's *Ups and Downs along the Black Sea*. Her difficulties too arise from attempts to impose her own unswerving objective on the resistant fabric of Turkey: her determination at all costs to cycle from Polonezköy, outside Istanbul, to Rize at the far end of Turkey's Black Sea coast.


Twopenny Press
Ups and Downs along the Black Sea
in the reverse footsteps of Xenophon
PENNY YOUNG

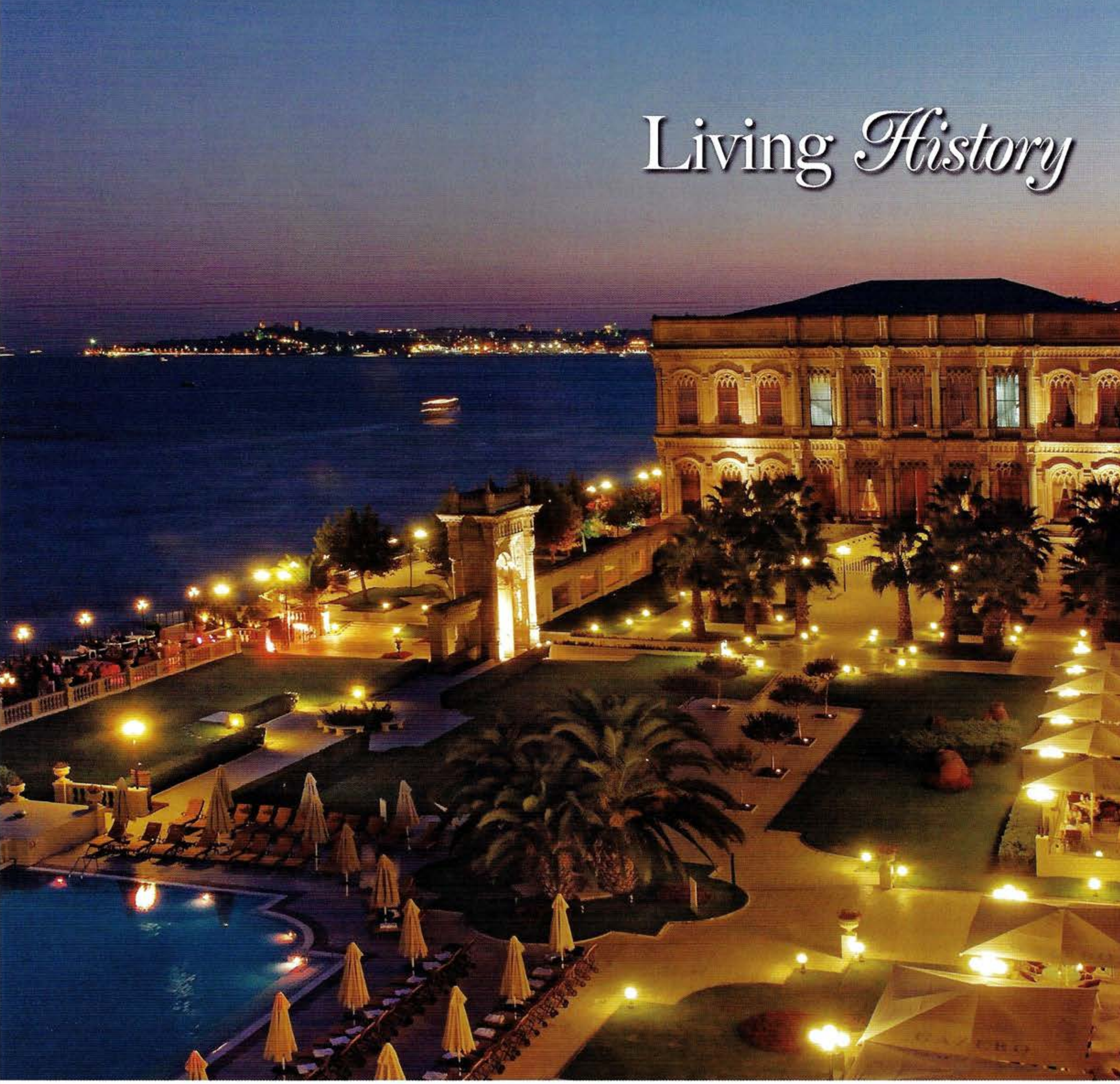
In other ways Penny Young is very unlike Frances Oliver. A mature woman, travelling alone, she is already familiar with Turkey. Her trip takes place some 30 years later than *Jaundiced in Antalya* and it takes her 13 years, rather than 40, to write it up. Once again, however, it is an extended account of suffering as she struggles against the landscape, the elements, hunger and exhaustion, sullen, uncooperative hoteliers and the manifold dangers of the coast road – too narrow for the volume of traffic, its surface appalling, and seemingly populated by hordes of lecherous lorry drivers.

Young has a good eye for detail. She writes evocatively and takes obvious joy in rural scenes and in food. She talks us through a variety of meals, some lavish, most simple and tasty, others repulsive. She describes in painful detail a series of predominantly dingy hotels and *pansiyons*. And there are many comic moments, such as when "a young boy translated my Turkish into Turkish so his dad could understand".

She is particularly good at describing the many frustrating and antagonistic encounters which occur throughout the journey. Though these are occasionally offset by more positive interactions, one wonders if she is somehow creating the conditions for misunderstanding and confrontation. A refusal to tolerate any form of conversation before her punitively early departures each morning is one example. She is also, understandably, sensitive to the general line of questioning she experiences. "If he had asked me what I was doing on my own and where my husband was, I swear I would have wrenched the knife out of his hand and stuck it through his heart." Even allowing for exhaustion and humorous hyperbole, this seems extreme.

From the beginning, Young intimates that this project is her response to a personal crisis and that she is hoping to resolve the issues in her life in the course of it. No further information is provided, but the confession somewhat hijacks the reader's attention from the journey into a search for clues about her back-story. The evidence points to a broken relationship. Even allowing for her vulnerability as an unaccompanied woman, she seems rather preoccupied with sex, ranging from the unwelcome advances of a veritable parade of seedy men, through the charms of attractive young men, to her interest in the behaviour of the Natashas of Rize and Trabzon. The hard, physical regime she inflicts on herself seems like some form of therapy or mortification of the flesh.

Although alone, she has some unusual companions. The most important is her bicycle, who she describes as an old friend with human characteristics. She (the bicycle) snoozes peacefully, gets cross and talks. "Get me out of here!" she mutters to her rider in Bafra. The other companions, albeit travelling in the opposite direction and two-and-a-half thousand years earlier, are Xenophon and the Ten Thousand. They appear regularly, though their connection with events seems tenuous. They have little to say but wave from the distance and move on. Their heroism and eventual triumph parallel Young's own, perhaps. Indeed, the final section of her journey, downhill from Çaykara to Rize, recalls Xenophon's record of his men finally seeing the same Fortunate Sea and is so lyrically written we share her joy that her trials are finally behind her. It does, however, raise the question she asks herself on the boat back to Istanbul. Why did she stick so slavishly to the main coast road and avoid the gentle pleasures of the hinterland until the last few days of her trip? ◆



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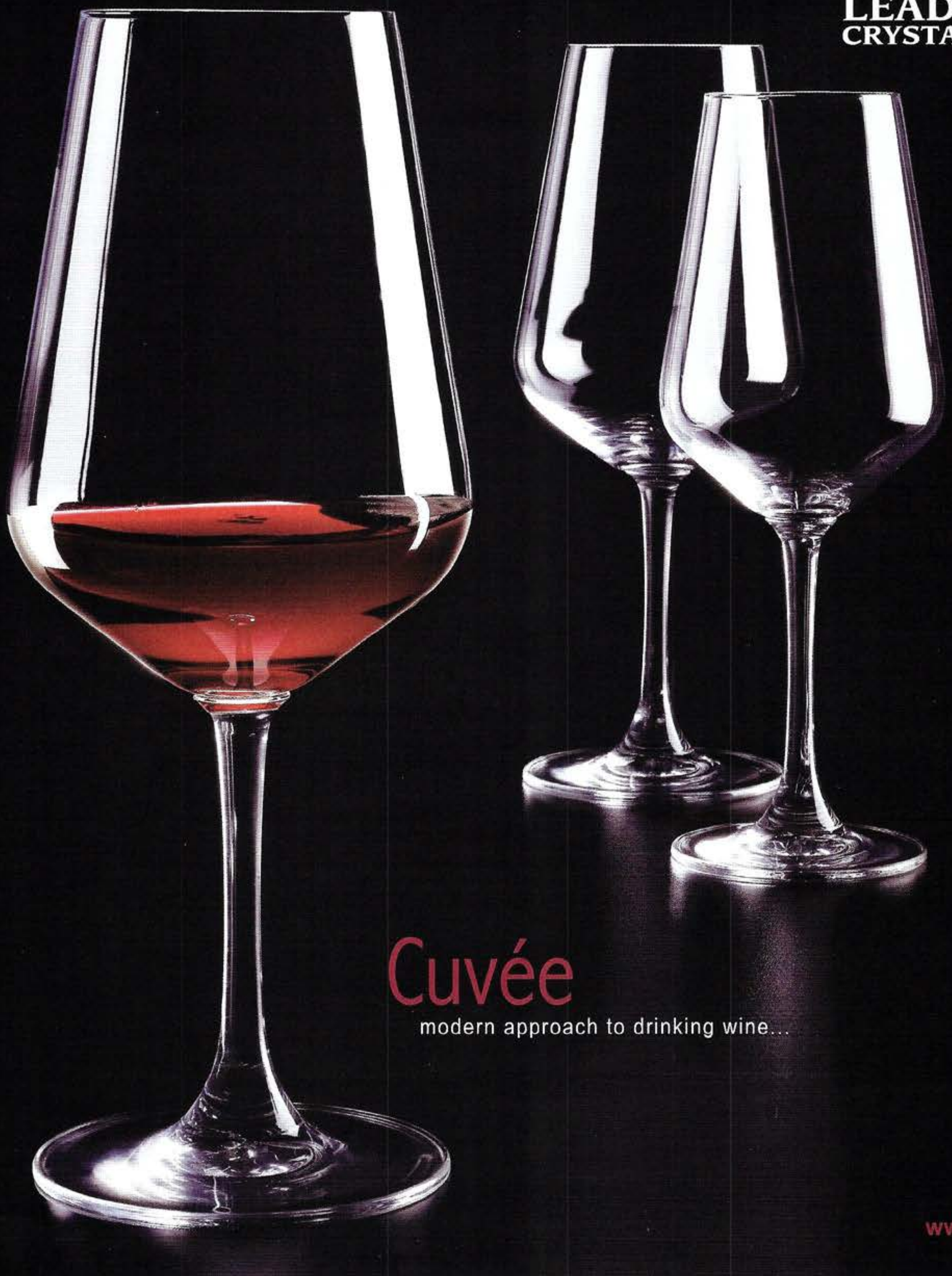

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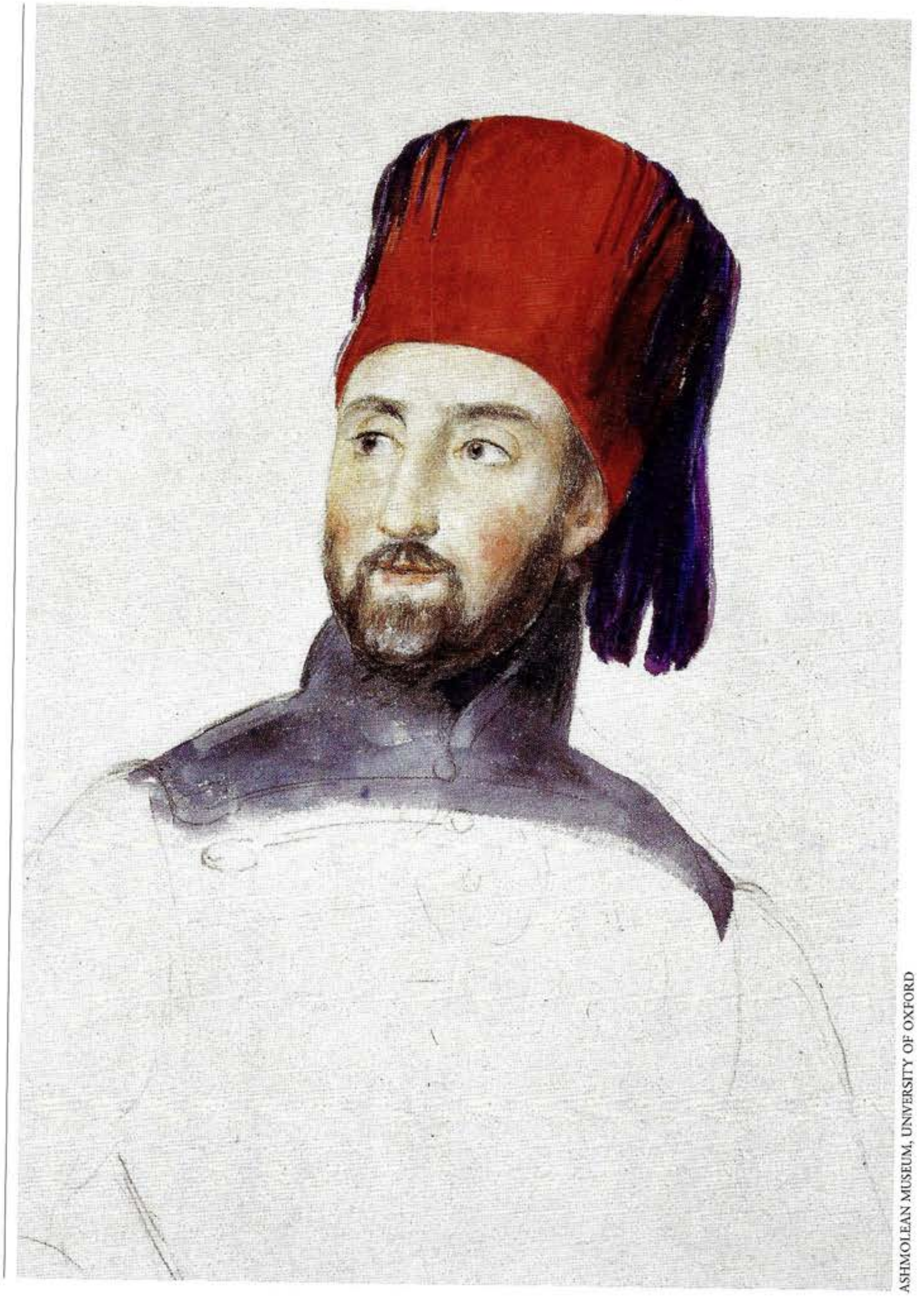
Mustafa Reşit Pasha (1799–1858)

HERO OF THE REFORMATION

If there is one man who can be credited with helping Turkey evolve from failing empire to modern state, it is Mustafa Reşit Pasha. David Barchard celebrates the life of the great Turkish reformer



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In the Ottoman Empire's crisis-packed final century, the 1830s were the grimmest decade. To appreciate just how bad things were for Turkey by 1839, consider the following scenario. The country – still a pre-modern state, with the monarch ruling from the palace through scribes rather than civil servants – was on the verge of being a Russian protectorate. Russian troops had had to be deployed on the Bosphorus as a last resort to defend the then Turkish capital against an Egyptian invasion. The empire's army had been wiped out in June 1839 in a battle at Nizip (today a prosperous town in southern Turkey near Gaziantep). The defeat on land was followed a month later by the defection of the navy under the admiral of the fleet. Worst of all, that year the reforming Sultan Mahmud II died an early death at the age of 54, partly brought on by drink, leaving behind him only a 16-year-old heir.

A Russian-led partition seemed inevitable. "Shall Turkey continue an independent kingdom?" asked Charles Boileau Elliot, an English clergyman in Istanbul in 1839. "It is clear that she can no longer entrench herself behind the barricade [of Islam] against the march of intelligence and improvement." In other words, if the empire was to have any chance of survival, it would have to modernise and Westernise.

As it happened, Mahmud II and one of his leading officials had already come to more or less exactly the same conclusions. During the last months of the Sultan's reign, Mustafa Reşit Pasha, both foreign minister and ambassador in London, had been designing a blueprint for wholesale reform of the Ottoman Empire's laws, administration, taxation and economy. Four months after the Sultan's death, the reform plans were unveiled at a grandiose ceremony in the area below Topkapı Palace which today is the Gülhane Park. On November 3, 1839, Reşit and the young sultan sat before a crowd of pashas, patriarchs, ambassadors and a visiting French prince, while Reşit read out the *Hatt-ı Humayün* of Gülhane (the Rescript of Gülhane).

The presence of the prince, Joinville, son of King Louis Philippe, was all that the international press picked up. Prince de Joinville himself did rather better, writing in his memoirs many years afterwards what is perhaps the best eyewitness account, but alas ignoring the contents. He had been told by his Turkish hosts, presumably by Reşit himself, that the decree was "a constitution" and "liberal": two words which killed the interest of any French prince, even in the egalitarian July monarchy.

The Rescript propelled Turkey and its people along an entirely new course, towards the West – a course that was widely regarded for the following few years as a failure. The Sultan backed Reşit's reforms, but they had precious few other real supporters at the court, and fewer still among the clergy and their followers. There was particular resistance to the idea of full equality for non-Muslims, a violation of Holy Law. Yet absolutely no alternatives were in sight.

The architect of the changes, Reşit Pasha, was afterwards regarded as the foremost Turkish statesman of his age. Yet somehow he was always a lonely figure, with more rivals than friends around him at court. A man of great intelligence and skill, Reşit had personally observed the disasters overtaking the empire at close quarters. His father, who died when Reşit was only ten years old, had been an accounts clerk for a mosque. In 1821, as a very young man, Reşit had gone to the Peloponnese after the start of the Greek War of Independence with his uncle, a military commander with no troops or money. Eight years later, after another Turkish defeat, this time in the Balkans by invading Russian armies, Mustafa Reşit took part in the negotiations for the ignominious Treaty of Adrianople and wrote the formal report on it for the Sultan. A year later he was sent on a mission to Egypt, where Kavalalı Mehmet Ali, then a rising star in international affairs and the most serious rival of the Sultan, offered Reşit the chance to join him. Reşit refused.

By now his abilities both as rapporteur and negotiator had been noticed in the palace. In his first years there Reşit handled correspondence between the palace and the provinces, becoming head of his department – one of the most important – by the time he was 32. By then, however, he was also dealing with international negotiations. In 1832 he was rapporteur at a conference at Tarabya, on the Bosphorus, where the British presided over a deal between the Ottoman Empire and the newly independent Greek kingdom, settling their common borders. There, for the first time, he met Stratford Canning, the British ambassador, who would be his friend and principal ally for the next quarter-century. His subordinates and colleagues often detested the arrogant and workaholic Canning, but he and Reşit seem to have been firm friends from the outset, with the Sultan jokingly warning that their friendship might provoke jealousy. Friendships between Muslims and Christians were a novelty at this date. But Canning, who was about to leave diplomacy temporarily for a dismally unsuccessful nine-year spell in Westminster politics, kept in touch with Reşit.

FACING PAGE MUSTAFA REŞIT PASHA, BY SIR DAVID WILKIE, DECEMBER 1840
Commissioned to paint the young Sultan Abdülmecid for Queen Victoria, Wilkie, who was 'Royal Limner' to the Queen, had to wait weeks for a sitting. Reşit Pasha, Secretary for Foreign Affairs and 'mover of everything here', in Wilkie's words, managed to arrange it just before his own fall from power. This sketch of Reşit Pasha, swiftly executed in watercolour over black chalk, may have served as a preparatory drawing for the Sultan's portrait: the angle of the head is identical. The Sultan's portrait now hangs in Kensington Palace

We do not know Reşit's private thoughts about Canning, though his dispatches to Istanbul make it clear that he was a convinced Westerniser, if not a naïve one. At times he could be quite bitter about Western double standards where Muslims and Muslim lives were concerned. Perhaps he privately found Canning's attitude to him rather condescending, for the British diplomat seems to have treated him as a pupil. Henry Layard, one of Canning's most brilliant juniors in the 1840s and a future ambassador in Istanbul himself, told his wife four decades later that "Reschid P. used to say…for goodness' sake keep the Ambassador away. I will do what he wants if he will give time and not hamper me with his violence." On the other hand he had strong grounds for gratitude, too. In the 1840s Reşit's career would have foundered at several points without Canning's backing.

All this was still far off when Reşit made his first laborious journey overland by horse as ambassador to Paris in 1834. (His later journeys, made after the introduction of the steamer, must have been a great deal more agreeable.) His original concern was with Algeria, an outlying Ottoman land, then being subdued with great brutality by the French armies. There was no hope of rescuing the Algerians, and in the second half of the decade his mission in the West switched to getting British support, first to head off the threat from Mehmet Ali and the Egyptians, and then to clip their claws and get Palestine, Syria and Adana restored to rule by the Sultan. The young Queen Victoria, in Reşit's first audience with her, promised him exactly this. The British were slower to support the Sultan against Egypt than Reşit and Mahmud II hoped. But by 1840 diplomacy had paid off. The Sultan regained his lost dominions west of Egypt; a settlement was reached with Mehmet Ali (though it is notable that there was never a marriage alliance with his family), thanks to British naval intervention on the Turkish side; the empire had temporarily regained its security.

By now Reşit was internationally famous as the leader of the Westernising party in Istanbul, with *The Times* and other newspapers reporting his activities and those of his rivals and describing him as a man of exceptional grace and cultivation – an achievement for someone of short stature and unprepossessing appearance, who had taught himself all he knew about European high society, having only started to learn French in his thirties.

The reforms, however, did not advance very far and Muslim-Christian equality languished. Government was in the hands of grand viziers of the old school. When a young Armenian who had oscillated between Christianity and Islam was executed in 1843 – and the same happened soon afterwards to a Greek in Bursa (the last occasion on which there was an official execution for apostasy in Turkey) – the events were seen in the West as a deliberate snub to Reşit and his policies by their opponents at court.

The early 1840s were the low point of Reşit's career. Early in 1841, 15 months after the Gülhane Rescript, he lost office, and in August that year he was sent to Paris as ambassador – evidently to keep him at arm's length from his British friends. Early in 1843 he was back in Turkey and out of favour: he had to struggle hard to avoid being relegated as governor to Edirne, a posting which contained a hint of possible execution.

But help was at hand. In January 1842 Stratford Canning returned to Istanbul as ambassador and stayed in the post for the next ten years. Canning proved more effective in Turkish politics than in those of his own country. His first aim was to build up a close link with Abdülmecid and so break the influence of Riza Pasha and the group at court responsible for Reşit's fall. His motives were strategic as well as political. The palace conservatives resisting change tended to be well disposed to Russia, which, like them though for reasons of her own, also opposed Ottoman reform and innovation. Canning – through his wife, who had not come out to Turkey – sent highly secret messages to Reşit in Paris, telling him to be ready to return to high office.

The call came at the end of 1845. Reşit became foreign minister and then, in the summer of 1846, grand vizier for the first time. He was now a true grandee. In the years that followed, Abdülmecid showered him with money and gifts and twice paid off his debts. Reşit promoted the interests of his family quite openly, in particular those of his eldest son, Mehmet Cemil, who in the 1850s was sent as ambassador to Paris.

At Reşit's side in government was a brilliant junior, A'ali Efendi, who had worked with him for a decade. These two and a third reformer, Fuat, would dominate the government of Turkey over the next quarter-century. With a Tanzimat "party" in the palace, the relaunching of Turkey along modern lines got under way. Alas, Reşit and A'ali fell out bitterly when the latter replaced him as grand vizier for the first time in August 1852.

International politics and diplomacy often overshadowed reform, with the main threat to the empire coming from Russia. Early in 1853 the Russian Tsar Nicholas proposed a partition of Turkey to the British. He was refused. Russia then demanded supervisory rights over all Greek Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, a move which also implied a break-up of the empire. From May that year Reşit was Ottoman foreign minister. In the palace the "war party" was eager to fight the Russians. Reşit knew that the Ottomans would have no chance alone. With singular adroitness, and working hand in glove with Canning, he first neatly isolated the Russians diplomatically and then worked on building a military alliance with Britain and France – neither of which had initially wanted any such thing. By February 1854 there was a formal alliance. The war that followed, the only one that century which Turkey won against Russia, ended the spectre of a Russian protectorate. But the peace that followed and the 1856 Treaty of Paris, the zenith of Ottoman influence that century, were the work of A'ali. Reşit, who could not conceal his jealousy and his loathing of his former protégé, took a trip to Egypt to avoid witnessing A'ali's triumph. A'ali, a modest man, took no joy in the breach.

THE DAY THAT CHANGED TURKEY FOR EVER

An account of the proclamation of the Rescript of Gülhane, 1839

"Since the return of Reschid Pasha from Paris, it had been generally known that some new regulations were in course of preparation at the Sublime Porte, but nothing certain was known as to their nature until Sunday the 3rd of November, when, at a grand meeting held on the Plain of Roses, near to the capital, the important document was proclaimed.

During the latter days of October, tents and kiosques were erected in the plain, and invitations sent to the representatives of the different powers and sects resident at Constantinople, and at eight in the morning of the 3rd of November, the various parties began to arrive on the ground. There were present the sultan, the vizier, the ulemas, the pashas, and other great officers of state; the ambassadors of England, France, Russia, and other Christian powers, with their dragomans; the patriarchs of the Greek and Armenian subjects; the chief rabbi of the Jews, and a host of less noted personages. When all was in readiness, Raza Pasha drew forth from a silk bag the firman of the sultan, and having handed it to Reschid Pasha, the latter proceeded to read it aloud to the assembled multitude; after which the meeting dispersed, and the various officers proceeded to the palace, where, under the sacred mantle of the prophet, they took the oath of allegiance to the Mussulman faith and the constitution just promulgated, and which, as may be justly said, was nothing more or less than swearing to two things diametrically opposed to one another."

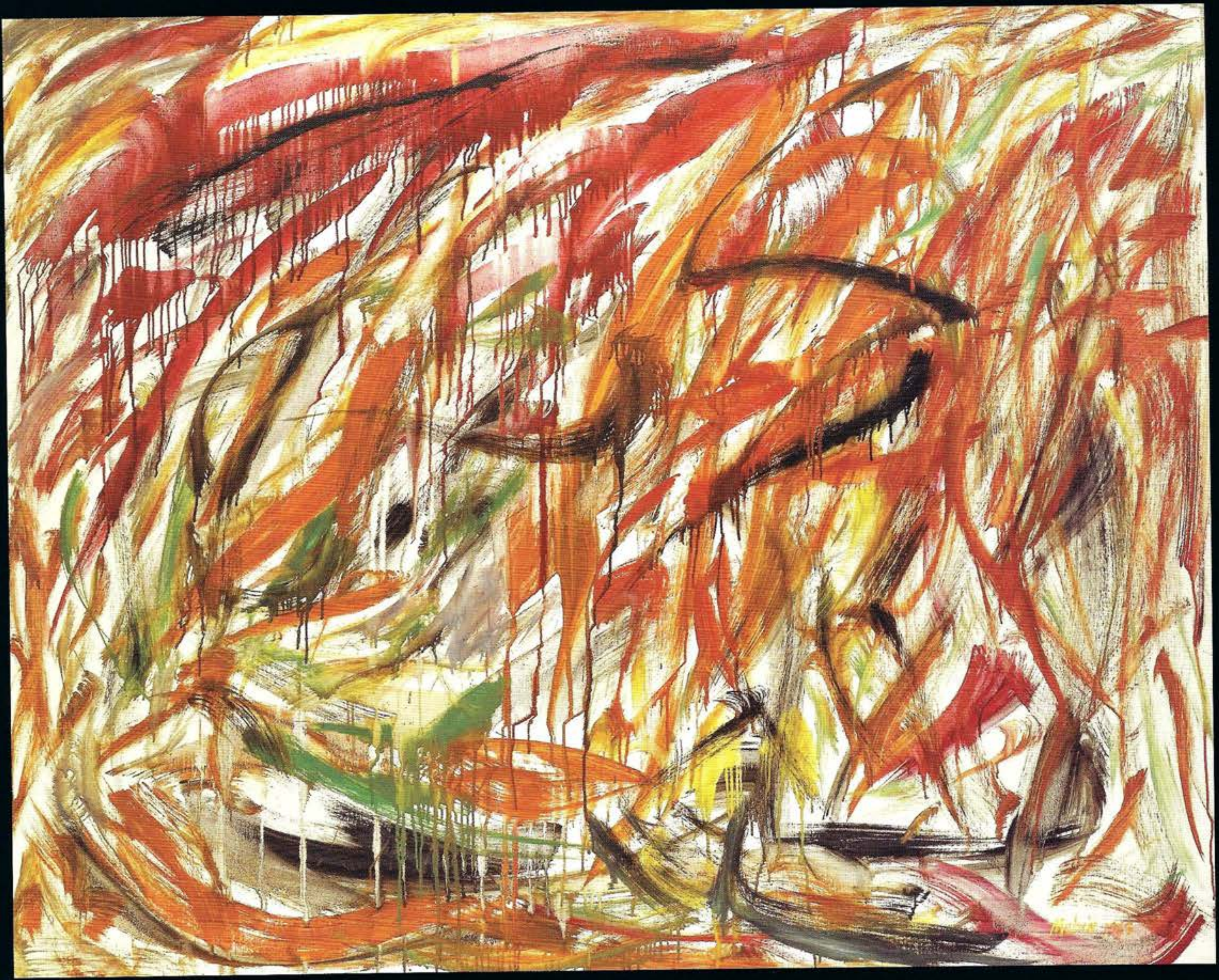
From *Turkey and the Turks: Being the Present State of the Ottoman Empire,* by John Reid, 1841

Reşit seemed to have been marginalised, but on October 10, 1857, Abdülmecid paid him the exceptional compliment of dining in Reşit's house at Emirgan, and 12 days later he was made grand vizier once more, provoking a furious outburst from the French ambassador, angry at a pro-British appointment. By now, however, Reşit's personal life – about which we know far less than we do about that of his British and French contemporaries – was overshadowed by tragedy. One son had died at Rustchuk, the Ottoman provincial capital on the Danube. Another, Ali Galip, died at the end of October, soon after Reşit took office, when a steamer ran into his boat on the Bosphorus.

On December 12, Reşit as grand vizier personally bade farewell to Canning at the dockside as the latter boarded a steamer. They would never meet again. Around the end of the year, the vizier became so ill that he could work only from his *yalı* at Emirgan. On January 7, 1858, he died suddenly, apparently of a heart attack. He was well short of 60. Stratford Canning, having recently left Istanbul for the last time, was given the news on board a boat approaching Dover. "Alas, poor Reşit," he murmured.

The Times, in a brilliant obituary from its Istanbul correspondent, offered the best last words on Reşit: "To recapitulate his life is like going through the history of Turkey for the last 30 years – to tell how an old social and political system, swaying 30,000,000 people, was gradually transformed and new life infused into an empire seemingly destined to die. It is to tell what one mind and one man's perseverance can do with the fate of a people, in breaking down the most strongly rooted prejudices, and opening out a new path. To understand Redschid Pasha's life and activity it is but fair not to look at what remains to be done, but what has been done in Turkey, and mostly, if not solely, by him." ◆

Mubin Orhon
Untitled, 1963
130 x 162cm
ESTIMATE £200,000–300,000



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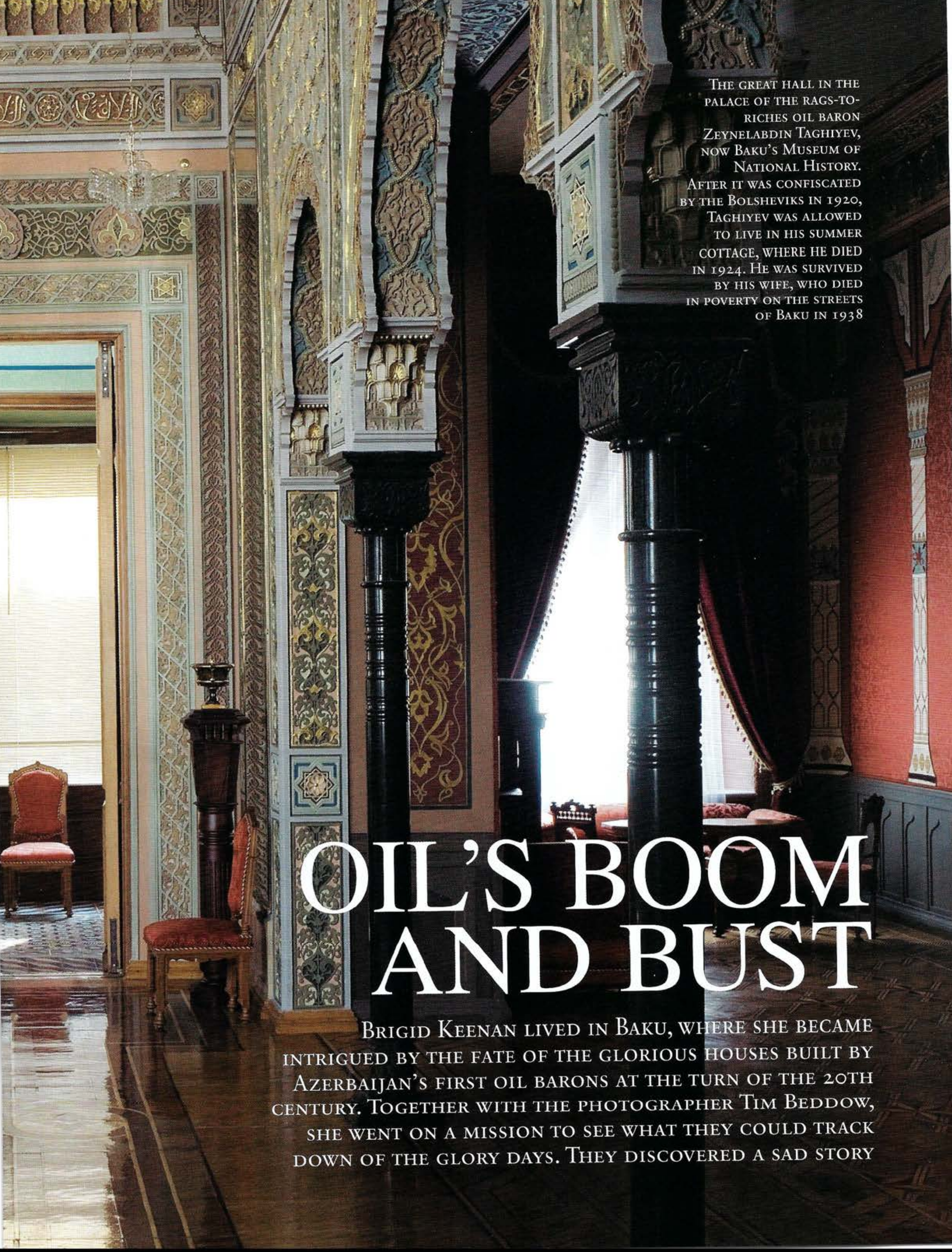
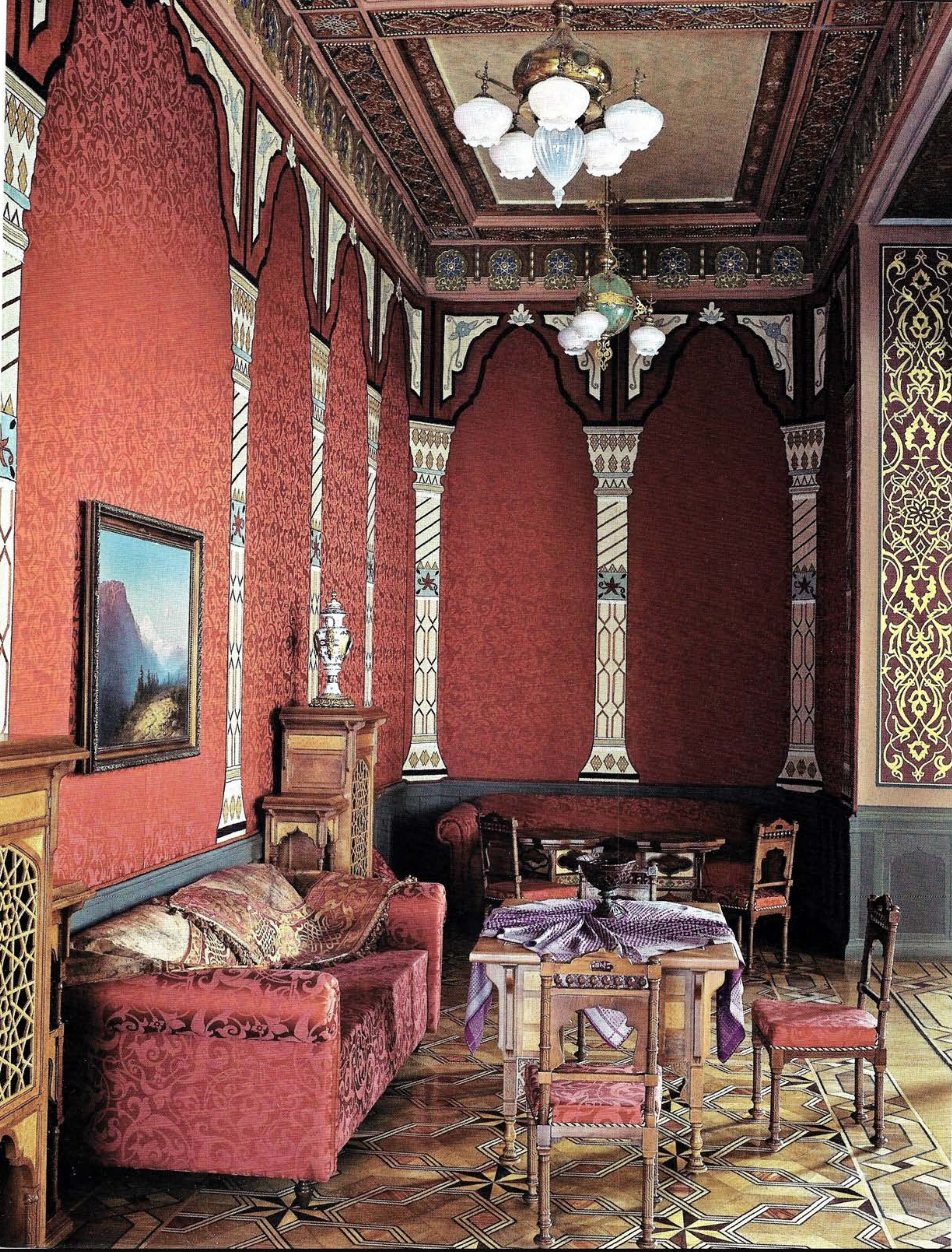


The great hall in the palace of the rags-to-riches oil baron Zeynelabdin Taghiyev, now Baku's Museum of National History. After it was confiscated by the Bolsheviks in 1920, Taghiyev was allowed to live in his summer cottage, where he died in 1924. He was survived by his wife, who died in poverty on the streets of Baku in 1938

OIL'S BOOM AND BUST

Brigid Keenan lived in Baku, where she became intrigued by the fate of the glorious houses built by Azerbaijan's first oil barons at the turn of the 20th century. Together with the photographer Tim Beddow, she went on a mission to see what they could track down of the glory days. They discovered a sad story



Left The furniture and decor in this lobby off the great hall in Taghiyev's house are copies. The parquet floor is original: the Italian restorers won their battle to retain it

Right Old photographs of the Taghiyev family helped restorers replicate interiors and furnishings. Here, the children perform in the great hall

Above The oil baron Hajinski built this colossal house in Baku. It is now divided into flats, one of which was Brigid Keenan's home. General de Gaulle stayed in another on his way to Moscow to meet Stalin during the war. Only one flat retains a little of the original decoration

Previous pages Elaborate ceiling and walls in Taghiyev's great hall. The decoration is copied from the original; the chandelier dates from the family's time

There is a building boom in Baku, Azerbaijan, the like of which has possibly not been seen since the dawn of Dubai. At one end of the Boulevard, the promenade that follows the curve of the Caspian round the Bay of Baku, they have just finished erecting The Tallest Flagpole In The World, and at the other, a colossal supermarket that looks like some gigantic beached whale is nearing completion; construction has just begun on the new Carpet Museum, shaped like a huge rolled-up rug; dozens of high-rise buildings in ever more extraordinary shapes are growing like fungi on the hillside (one of them, a hotel owned by the President's wife, is shaped like a flame because Azerbaijan is the land of eternal fires). Zaha Hadid's Haidar Aliyev Cultural Centre is under construction, and a vast new project, the Globus Plaza, is lined up for her in the future. Buildings that look like flying saucers, cigars, globes, rings, you name it, are in the pipeline.

It is all a very far cry from the beautiful city of Baku built by the first oil barons in the brief 40-year period between the discovery and exploitation of oil in the 19th century, and the invasion of Baku by the Bolsheviks in 1920.

Ludwig Nobel, one of the first oil barons (and brother of Alfred, who created the Nobel Prize), described the frenzied, oil-obsessed town of Baku in 1870 as being like the Klondike in the gold rush. By 1900 Azerbaijan supplied more than half the world's oil, and the successful speculators became the new aristocrats, vying with one another to create the most spectacular and extravagant houses in the capital – the houses have their owners' initials, sometimes their names, carved into the façades like designer labels. It is said that one super-competitive chap actually built a house in solid gold; another, the self-taught oil engineer Murtuza Mukhtarov, built an enormous Gothic palace for his wife as a Valentine's Day surprise – she had admired a building in Europe when they were travelling together, and he secretly commissioned a copy of it for her back home.

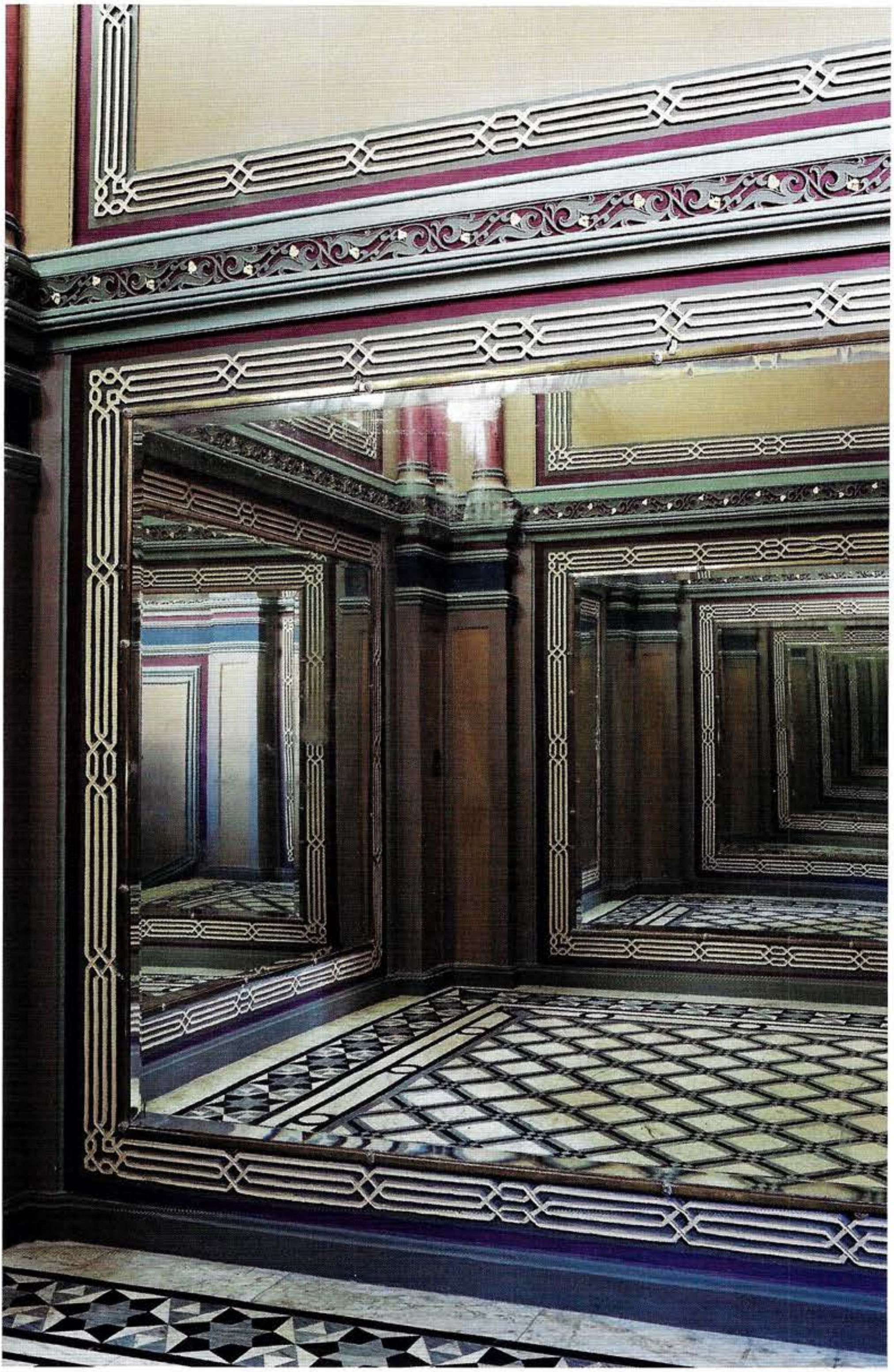
Baku had been an Oriental city but now everything European became the craze. European-style architecture, and quite often European architects, designers, artists, workers in stucco, metal, stone and wood – there were jobs for them all in Baku. Hundreds of new buildings were constructed in those years, every one decorated with hand carving, or painting, or marquetry, parquet, gilding, and so on. Whole streets of these houses, built in the local golden stone, made – still make – parts of Baku look like Paris. The building frenzy then must have felt much as it does now.

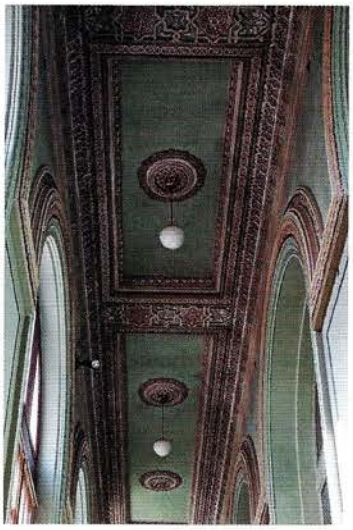
Some of the oil barons – the Nobels, the Rothschilds – were foreigners, but most were locals, and there are wonderful rags-to-riches stories, the best one being the tale of Haji Zeynelabdin Taghiyev. Taghiyev, the illiterate son of peasants, scrimped and saved and, with partners, invested in a piece of land hoping to find oil. They found nothing and the partners pulled out – but then came a small earthquake and suddenly oil gushed from Taghiyev's land. Overnight he became one of the richest men in the world. Like many of the other oil barons of those times, Taghiyev not only built himself a fabulous palace, but used his fortune for good, creating schools, public buildings and a whole fresh-water system for Baku, with a reservoir outside the town and pipes and canals and pumps to bring water to the city.

Those first oil barons were civic-minded: oil tankers were obliged to bring soil back to Baku from fertile Lenkaran in the south – the Baku soil was poor – so that gardens and parks could be created for the people. The Nobel family, whose house was a few kilometres outside Baku in what was known as the Black City (Baku itself was the White City), built a theatre (and formed a small orchestra to play there), as well

continued on page 47

By 1900 Azerbaijan supplied more than half the world's oil, and the successful speculators became the new aristocrats, vying with one another to create the most spectacular and extravagant houses in the capital

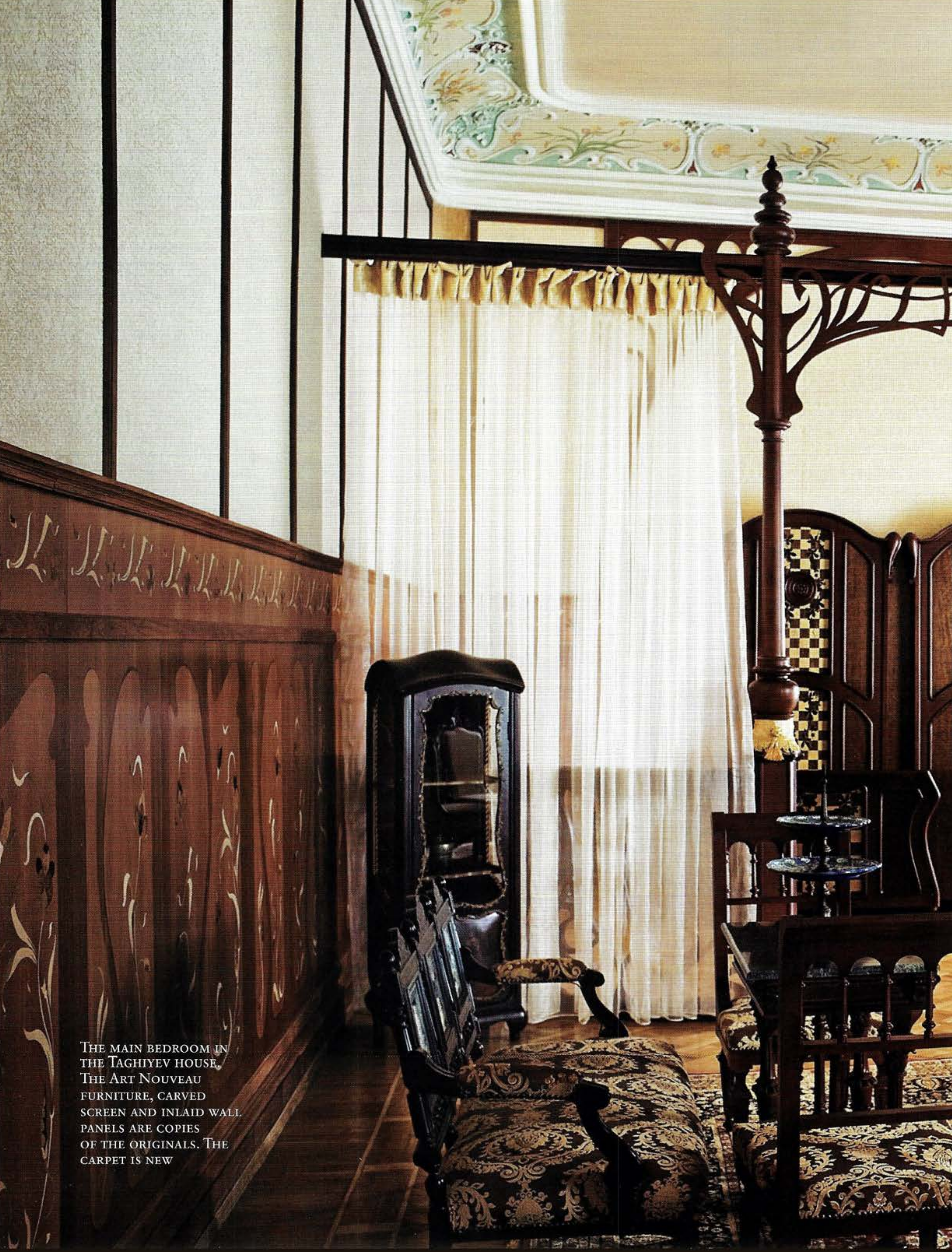




ABOVE THE CEILING OF THE WINTER GARDEN OFF THE GREAT HALL OF TAGHIYEV'S PALACE

LEFT INFINITY VIEWS ARE REFLECTED IN THE MIRRORS AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRCASE IN THE GREAT HALL

RIGHT THE STATUE AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS ORIGINALLY HELD A GOLDEN TRAY GIVEN TO TAGHIYEV BY THE EMIR OF BUKHARA



The main bedroom in the Taghiyev house. The Art Nouveau furniture, carved screen and inlaid wall panels are copies of the originals. The carpet is new

as a school and a hospital for their workers.

All of these were burned to the ground by the 11th Red Army when the Soviets stormed into Baku in 1920. The Nobels escaped with their lives, but many oil barons did not – Mukhtarov, he of the surprise Valentine's gift, shot the soldiers who rode into his palace on horseback, but then turned the gun on himself. Every house was commandeered, and no "capitalist" was allowed to stay. Even Taghiyev's good works counted for nothing; he and his family were thrown out of their glittering palace – in which gifts from European nobility mingled with those from the Emir of Bukhara – with only the clothes on their backs.

The Soviets turned some of the most spectacular of the barons' houses into institutions: part of Taghiyev's house became a museum; the ornate and beautiful house that the Rothschilds built for their manager became Baku's National Art Gallery (though for a while it was the offices of the new Soviet party leaders). The beautiful house once owned by the folk-singer-cum-oil-millionaire Mir-Babayev became the headquarters of the nationalised oil industry – today it is the offices of the State Oil Company. The house that was the Valentine's gift became the Wedding Palace, where couples celebrated their union. The marvellously painted home of Agha Bala Guliyev, the Flour King of Baku, became the Architects' Union, the girls' school that Taghiyev built became the Institute of Manuscripts, and the Muslim Philanthropic Society, modelled on the Doge's Palace in Venice and built by Naghiyev, the richest baron of them all, in memory of his son, became the Academy of Sciences (it was rebuilt after a fire, and the new building has Soviet stars instead of Koranic calligraphy).

Buildings not imposing enough to be turned into institutions got short shrift in the 70 years of Soviet rule: they were divided up into small apartments, their decoration destroyed, their creators and their history forgotten.

Now, nearly two decades since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline supplies the West with oil, and the city is booming and once again proud of its oil barons.

But they don't like "old" in prosperous modern Baku. Even in the Old City, a small area of town which surrounds the old ruler's palace and is a UNESCO World Heritage site, houses have been demolished to make way for a Four Seasons Hotel, and many others have been refaced in new or "compo" stone. This is a favourite trick in Baku, where restoration seems to mean making everything new again. When Taghiyev's house underwent a massive restoration recently, even the front door was replaced by an identical new one. I watched as, for no apparent reason, the stone carvings were sliced off the outside of my favourite house in the town and replaced with new carving.

The worst example of this refacing idea is happening right now to the famous girls' school just outside the Old City (where Nino studied in the great love story *Ali and Nino*) – the whole façade has been removed and is being replaced with an entirely new one in a different design. It will look nice, but it will not be the original. Similarly, the stone arches of the old arcade in the town known as the Art Alley have just been knocked down and replaced with new ones. (The clean-up does not apply round the backs or inside the buildings, which are often in a shocking state. It really is façadism.) Aside from renewing façades, there is a positive fever for restoring the institutions housed in the wonderfully decorated oil

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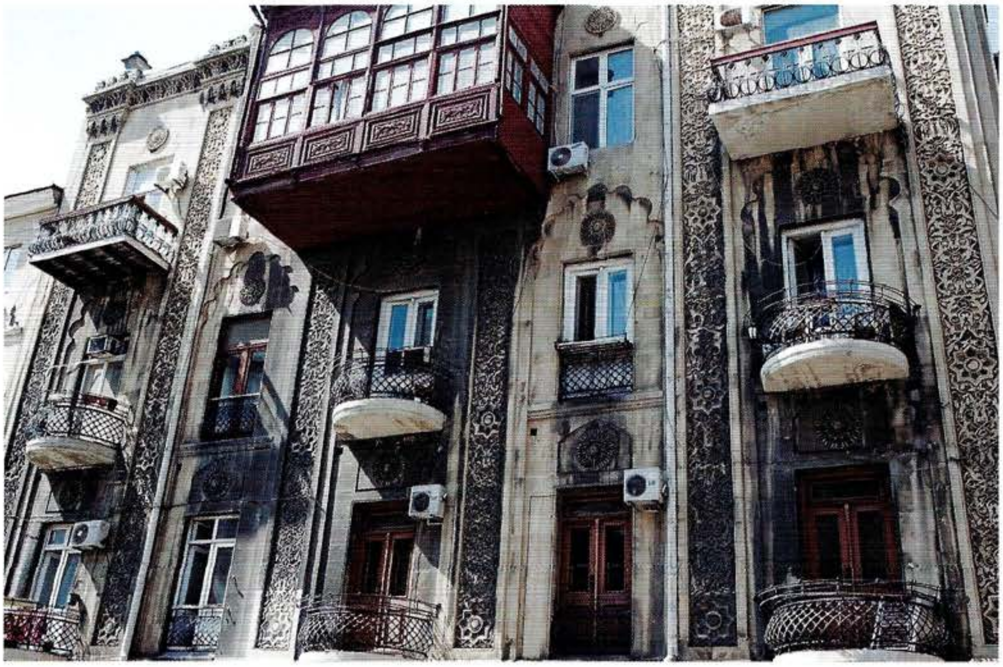
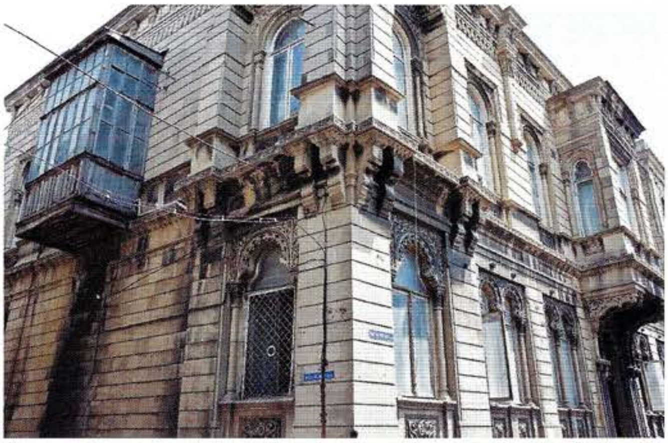
OPPOSITE THE BOUDOIR IN THE TAGHIYEV PALACE. THE WALLS WERE PAINTED OVER IN THE SOVIET PERIOD BUT HAVE BEEN RESTORED TO THEIR ORIGINAL DECORATION. THE FURNITURE IS REPRODUCED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS. THE MIRRORED CEILING OF THE BOUDOIR HAD SUFFERED DAMAGE OVER THE YEARS; THE ITALIAN RESTORATION TEAM WORKING ON THE HOUSE CALLED IN IRANIAN EXPERTS TO MEND IT



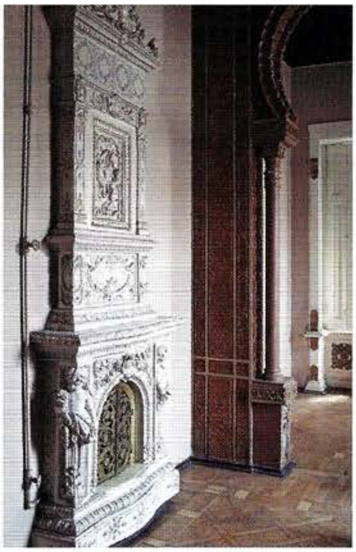
LEFT THE WONDERFUL ART DECO RAMAZANOV MANSION IN BAKU'S OLD CITY. SADLY, LIKE MOST SUCH BUILDINGS, IT WAS DIVIDED INTO FLATS AND NEARLY ALL THE ORIGINAL INTERIOR DECORATION WAS LOST

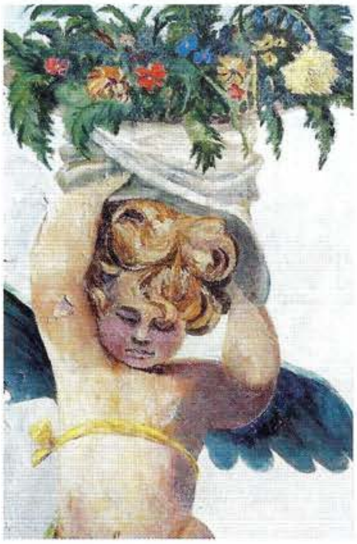
The marvellously painted home of Agha Bala Guliyev, the Flour King of Baku, became the Architects' Union. The Muslim Philanthropic Society, modelled on the Doge's Palace, became the Academy of Sciences… Buildings not imposing enough to be turned into institutions got short shrift in the 70 years of Soviet rule



Left The house built in 1899 by the mill-owner Agha Bala Guliyev, known as the Flour King of Baku, is now the Architects' Union, and closed for restoration. Eugeniusz Skibinski, the Polish architect, included Baku's 'Oriental' railway station among his 250 works

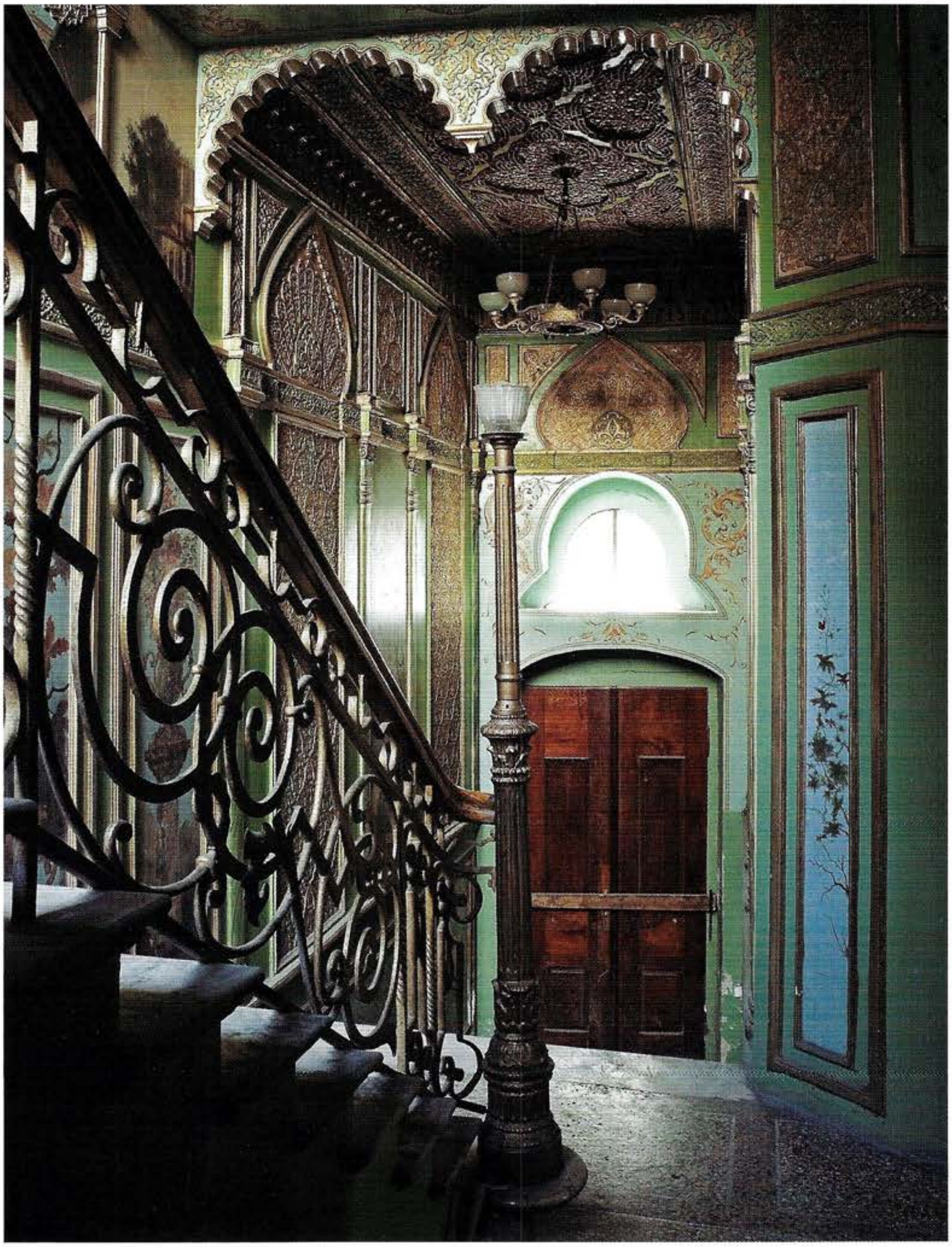
Below and opposite The painted stairwell of Guliyev's house, with its Mughal arches and murals of Ottoman scenes

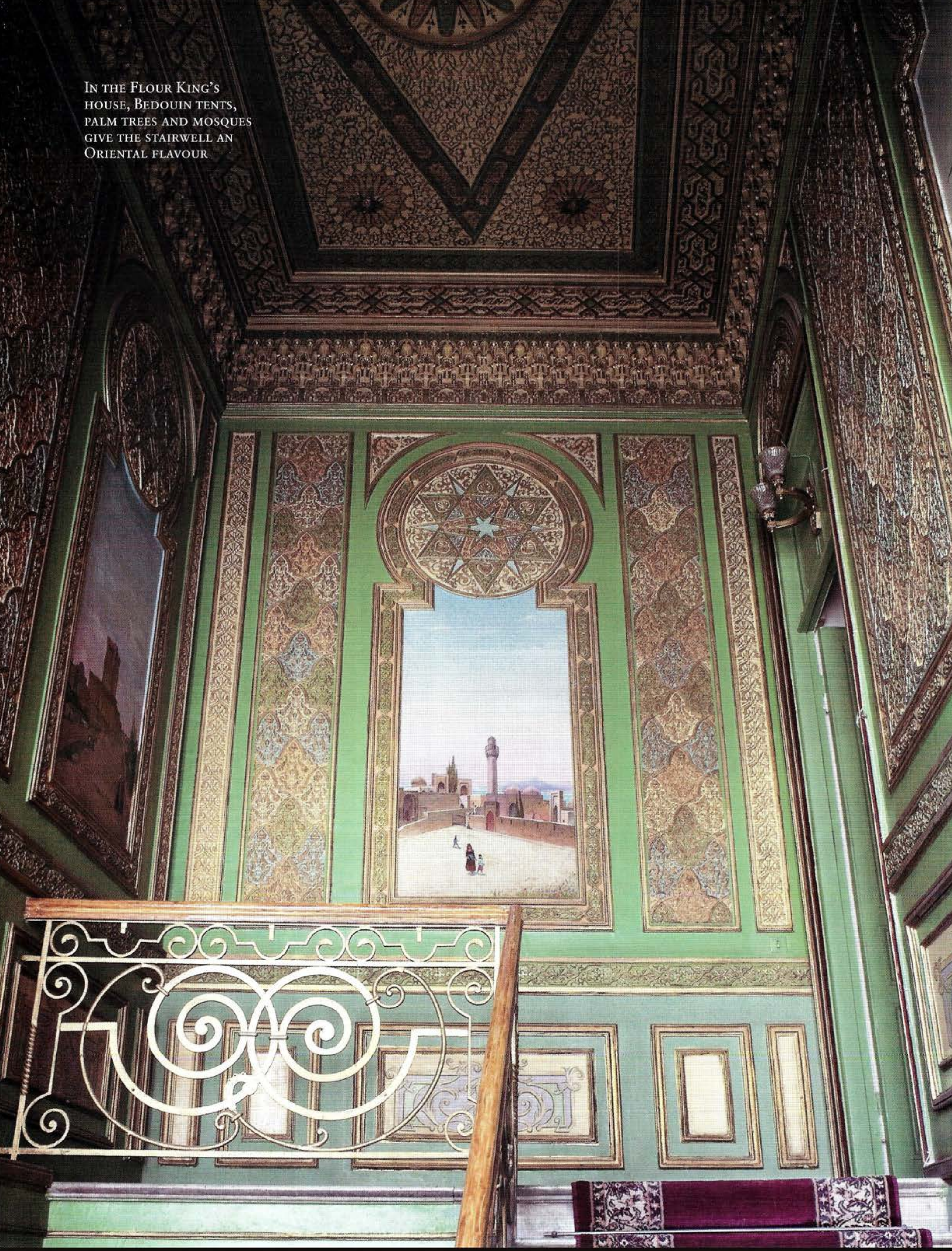




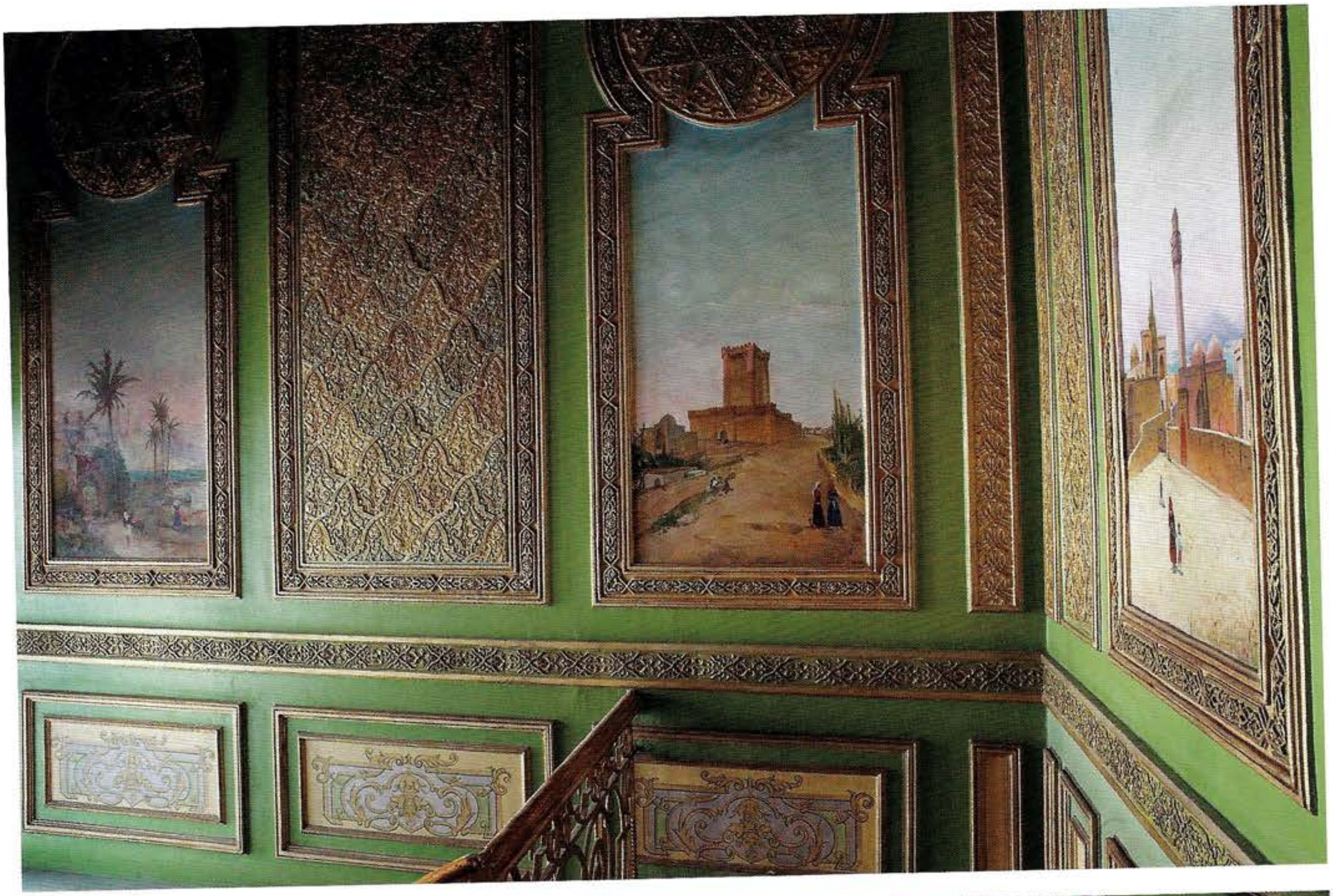
Top A magnificent faience stove in the sitting room of the Flour King's house

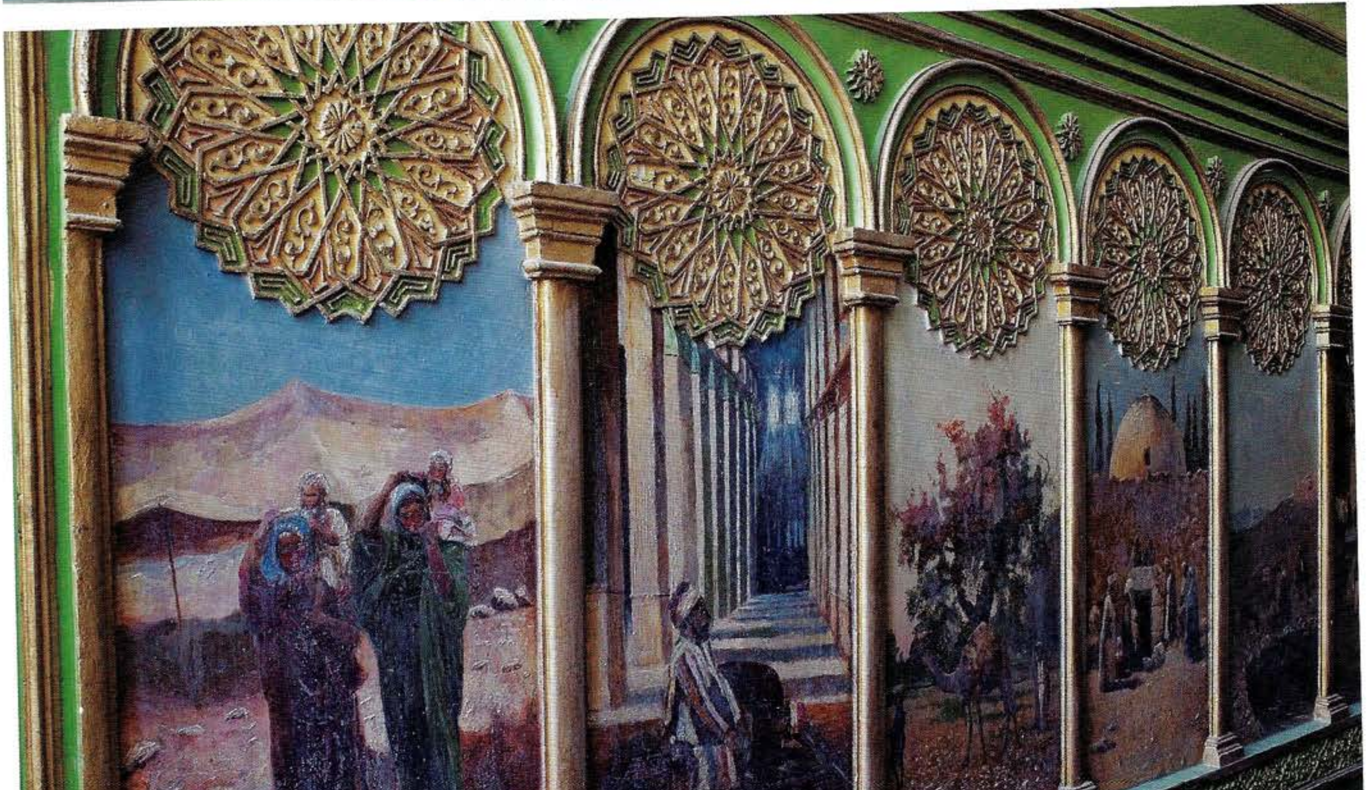
Above A golden-haired cherub bearing flowers in one of Guliyev's murals

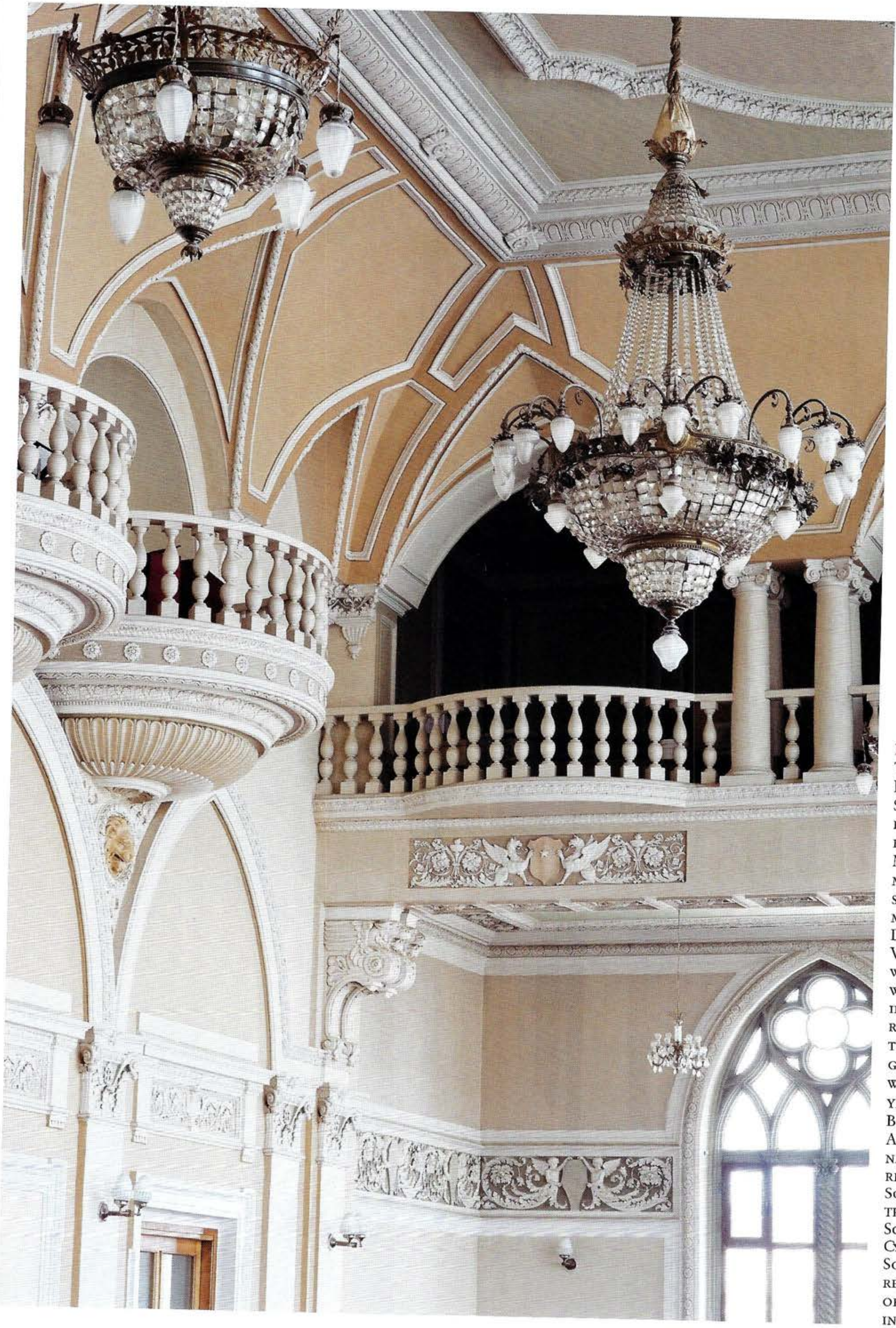




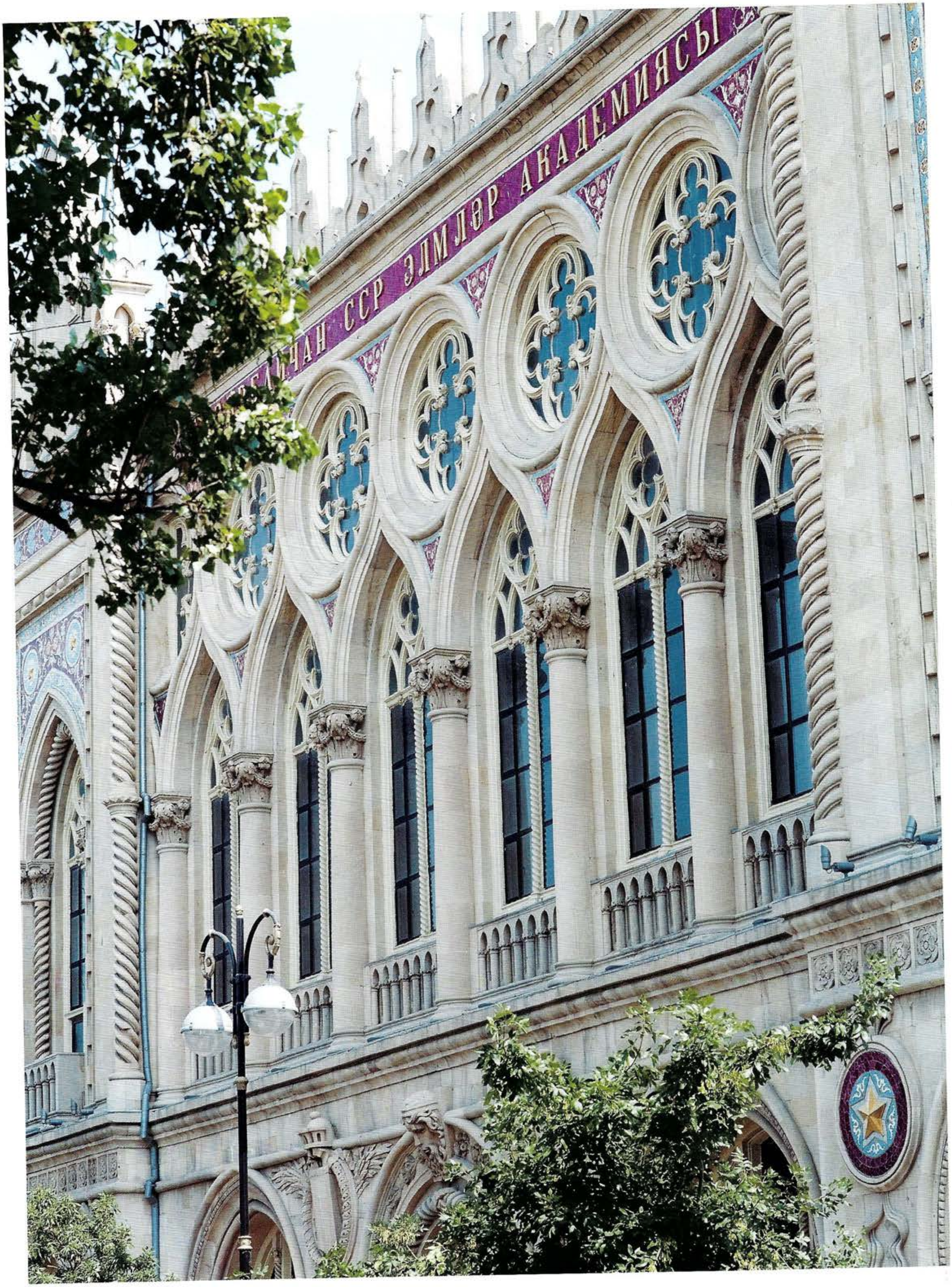
In the Flour King's house, Bedouin tents, palm trees and mosques give the stairwell an Oriental flavour







LEFT AND OPPOSITE The Muslim Philanthropic Society was built by the richest baron of all, Musa Naghiyev, in memory of his dead son. It was modelled on the Doge's Palace in Venice. In 1918, when Azerbaijan was briefly an independent republic, it became the seat of government, but it was burned that year by gangs of Bolsheviks and Armenian nationalists. It was rebuilt later by the Soviets and became the Academy of Sciences, with Cyrillic text and Soviet stars replacing the original Koranic inscriptions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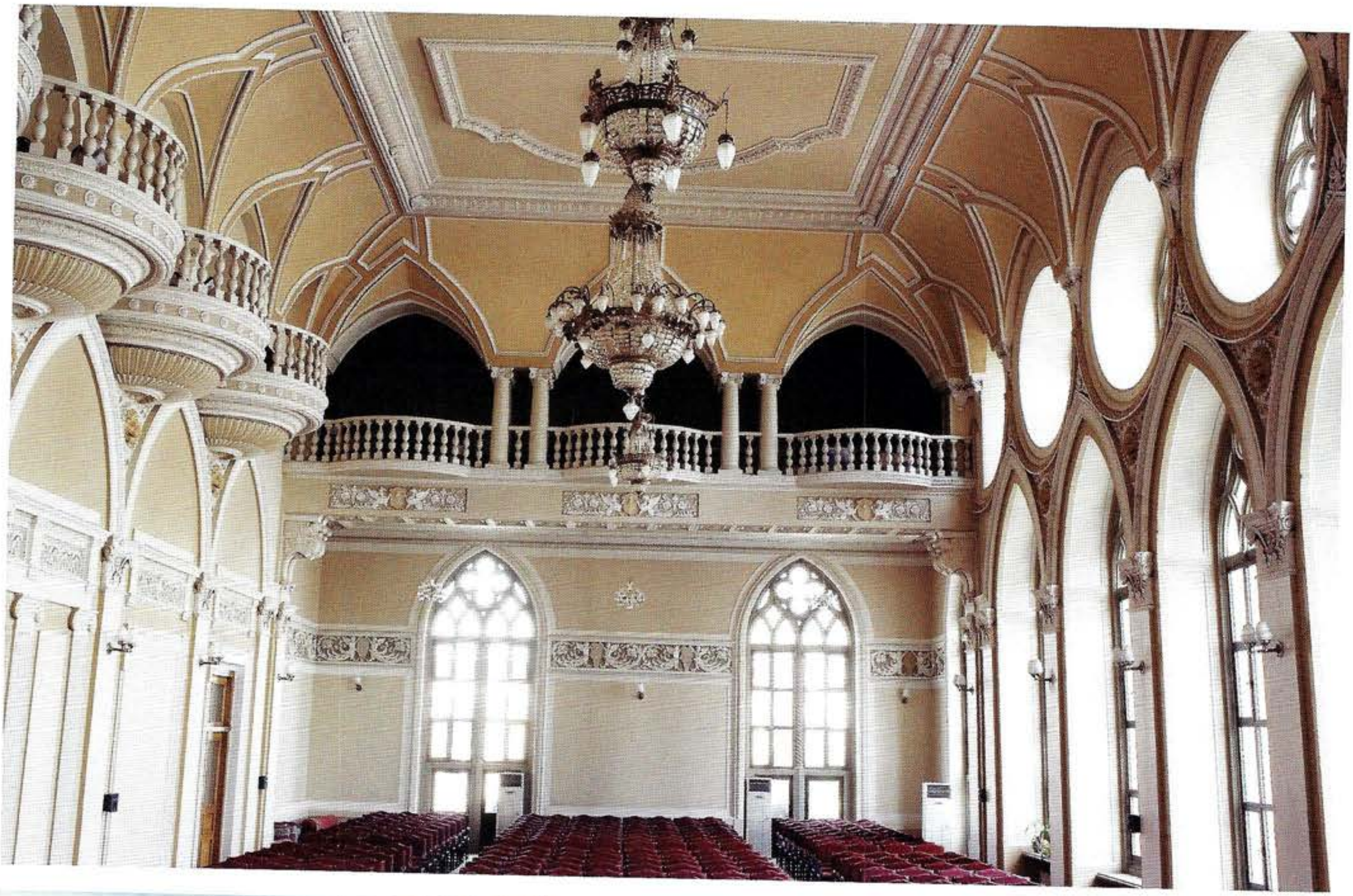
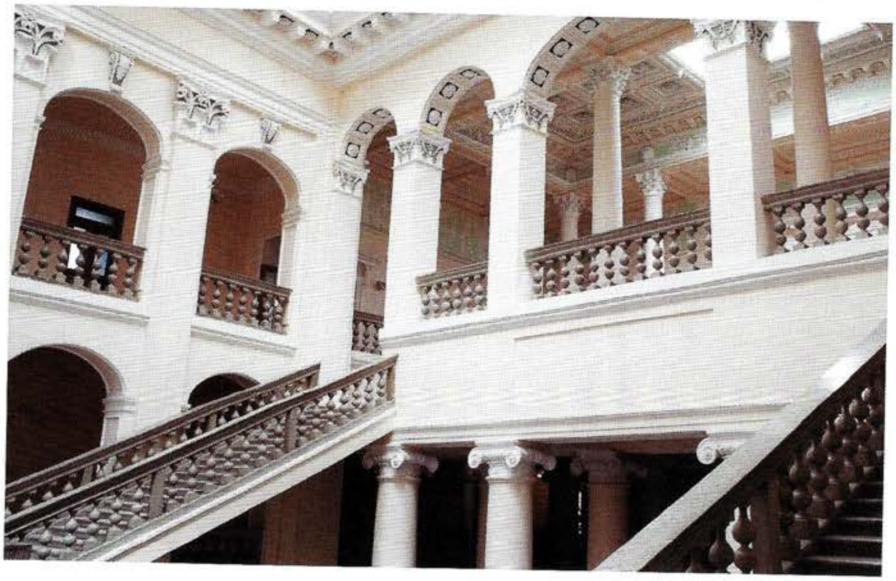




Top The concert hall built for the Muslim Philanthropic Society

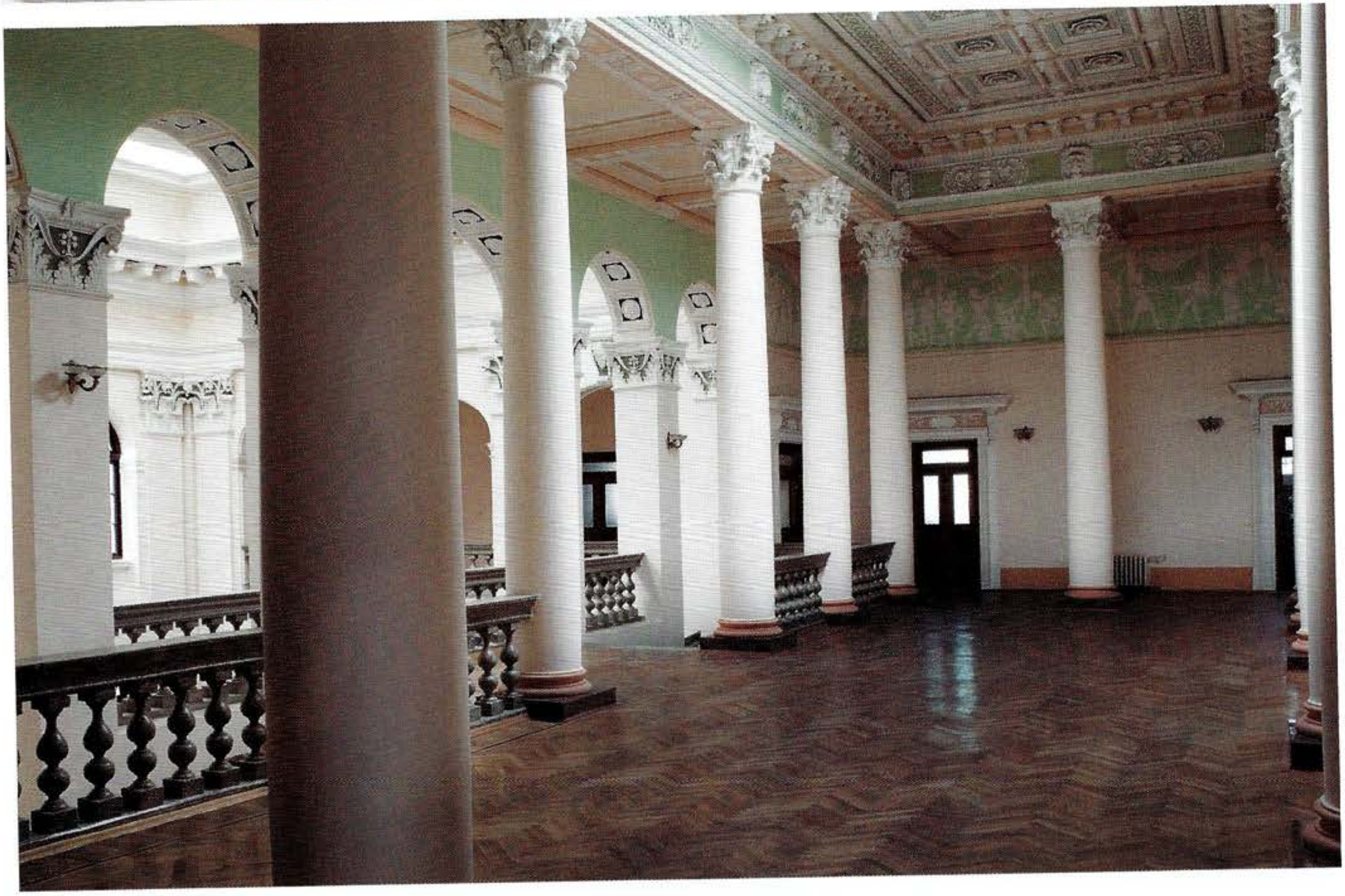
Below and opposite The great staircase and Neoclassical landing

Left The famous Molokan Gardens, where demolition is now gathering pace

barons' houses – anything worn or old, anything with character, has to go. Right now the Wedding House is closed for restoration, as are the Architects' Union, the National Art Gallery and the Institute of Manuscripts. In the meantime the lesser oil barons' houses, the ones that were not turned into institutions, are sorely neglected or, worse, being pulled down.

The old stone houses along one whole side of the pleasant Molokan Gardens square in the centre of town have recently disappeared, and a kilometre-long block behind the Haidar Aliyev Concert Hall is currently being demolished to make way for a colossal new development. Most of the disappearing houses in this particular area are small and insignificant, but the neighbourhood used to have a nice feeling and there is one important oil baron's house that, according to the locals, is to be pulled down with the rest. It is the Melikov house. built in 1910 and described as a valuable architectural monument by Shamil Fatullayev, whose book on the old houses, *The Architectural Encyclopedia of Baku*, is a bible for anyone interested in this city.

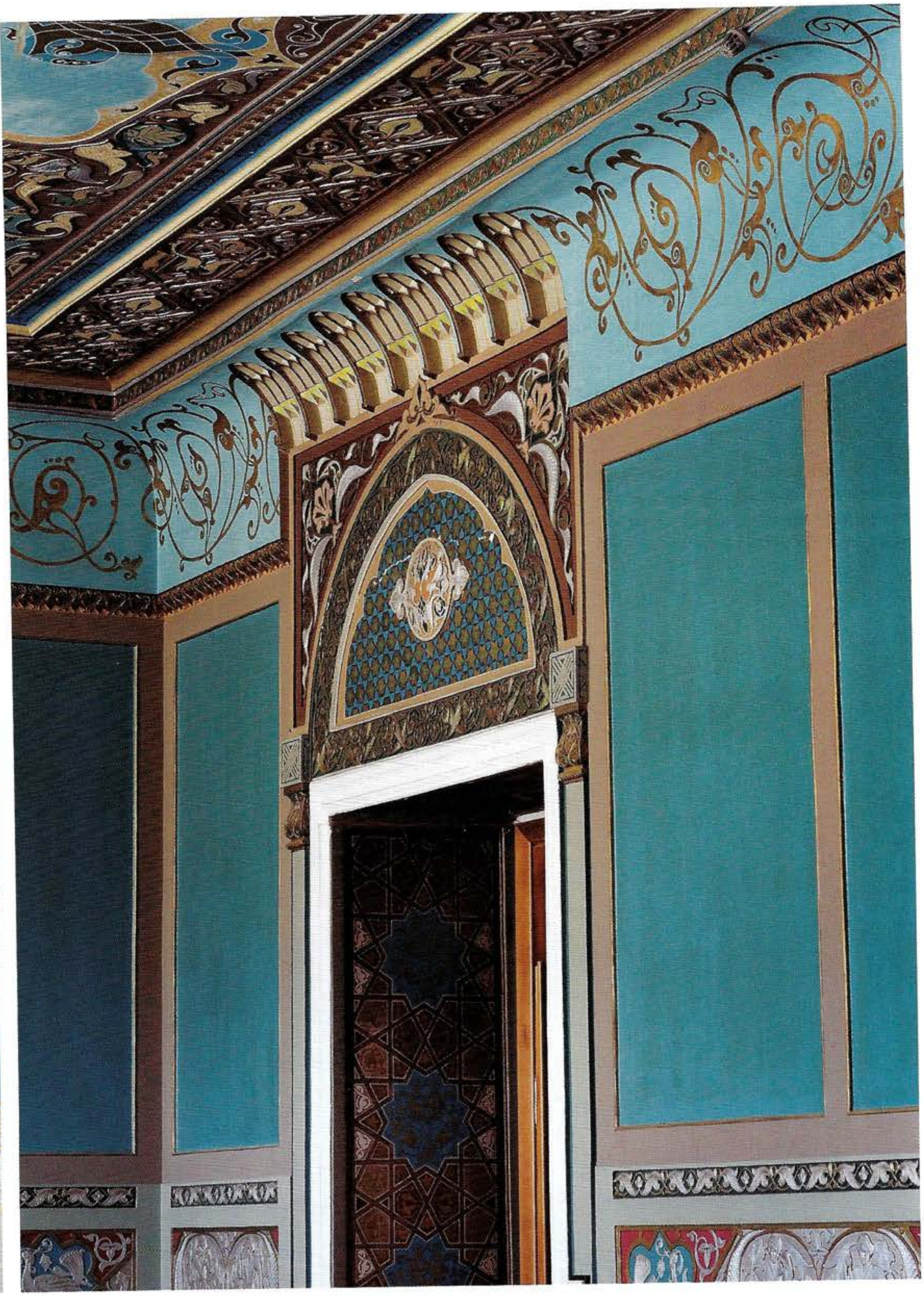
Meanwhile, in pretty Mamadaliyev Street (right behind the demolished side of the Molokan Gardens), there is a row of important oil-baron houses which also feature in the *Encyclopedia*, the best-known of which has four rather podgy

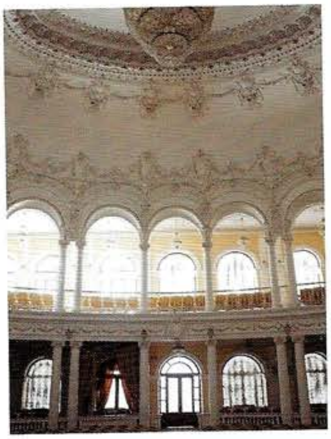


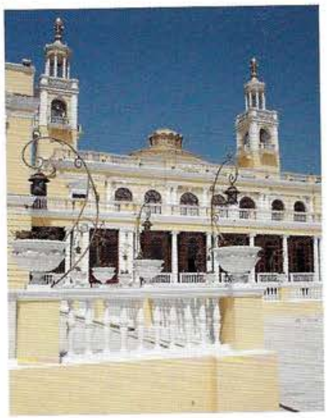
OPPOSITE AND RIGHT THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES ARE AS PAINSTAKINGLY RESTORED AS THE PUBLIC ROOMS OF THE BUILDING

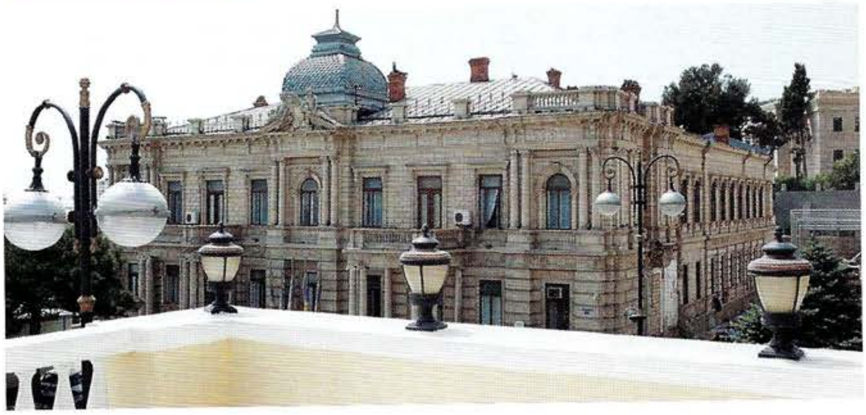
BELOW THE CONCERT HALL IN THE PHILHARMONIA, BUILT BY THE OIL BARONS IN 1910 FOR THEIR OWN ENTERTAINMENT. THE WEDDING-CAKE EXTERIOR WAS LOOSELY MODELLED ON THE CASINO IN MONTE CARLO

BOTTOM THE PALACE BUILT BY THE ROTHSCHILDS FOR THEIR MANAGER IN BAKU, DE BOER, IS NOW THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY OF AZERBAIJAN









At this rate, Baku is soon going to look very modern and clean and shiny and perfect, like a Disney World version of itself, and future generations will have lost all that was old and genuine

Atlas figures holding up its balconies. Next door to it is the charming house that used to be the Georgian embassy – ominously, all these houses are empty and in a parlous state. It seems clear that they are being allowed to fall down so that a large development can take place on the site.

At this rate, Baku is soon going to look very modern and clean and shiny and perfect, like a Disney World version of itself, and future generations will have lost all that was old and genuine. I asked Fatullayev what he thought of the changes that have taken place in the town since he catalogued and described it so meticulously only just over ten years ago. "It hurts me," he said. "I try to tell people what is happening, but it makes no difference."

Another Azerbaijani commented: "In the first oil boom the barons built the most beautiful city of Baku; in the second oil boom they are destroying it."

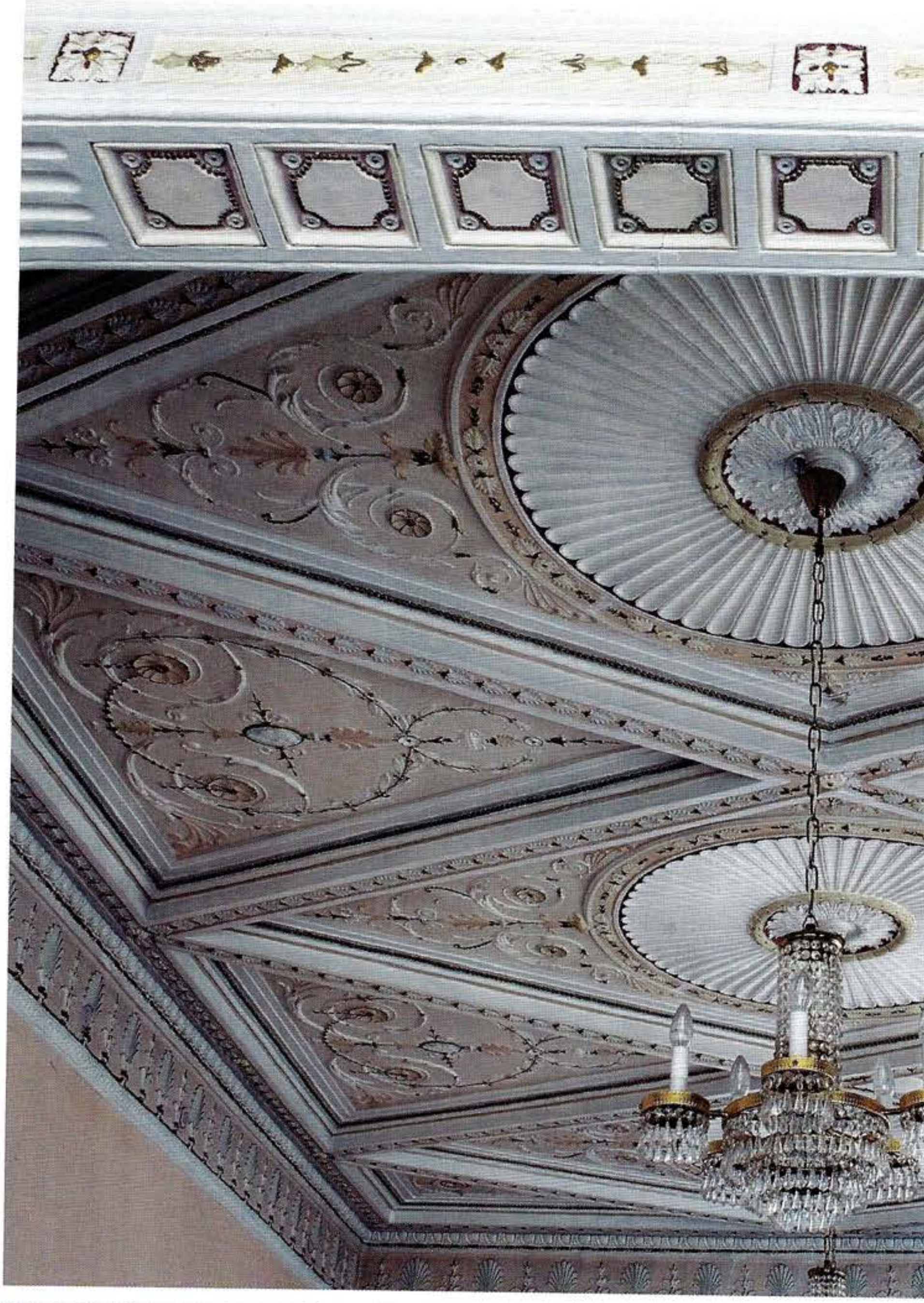
But then again perhaps this is exactly the kind of thing people in Baku said 130 years ago when those first oil millionaires began replacing ancient Azerbaijani buildings with their new Parisian pastiches. ◆

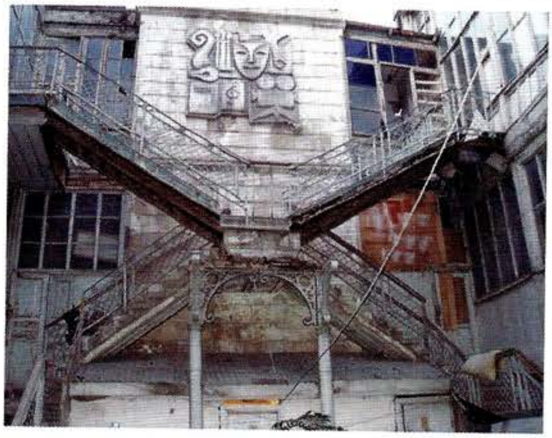
FURTHER READING

Azerbaijan International Magazine at www.azer.com. This prize-winning magazine, edited by Betty Blair, comes out two or three times a year and covers every aspect of Azerbaijan, including the architecture.

Azerbaijan with Excursions to Georgia by Mark Elliott, £14.99, from www.trailblazer-guides.com

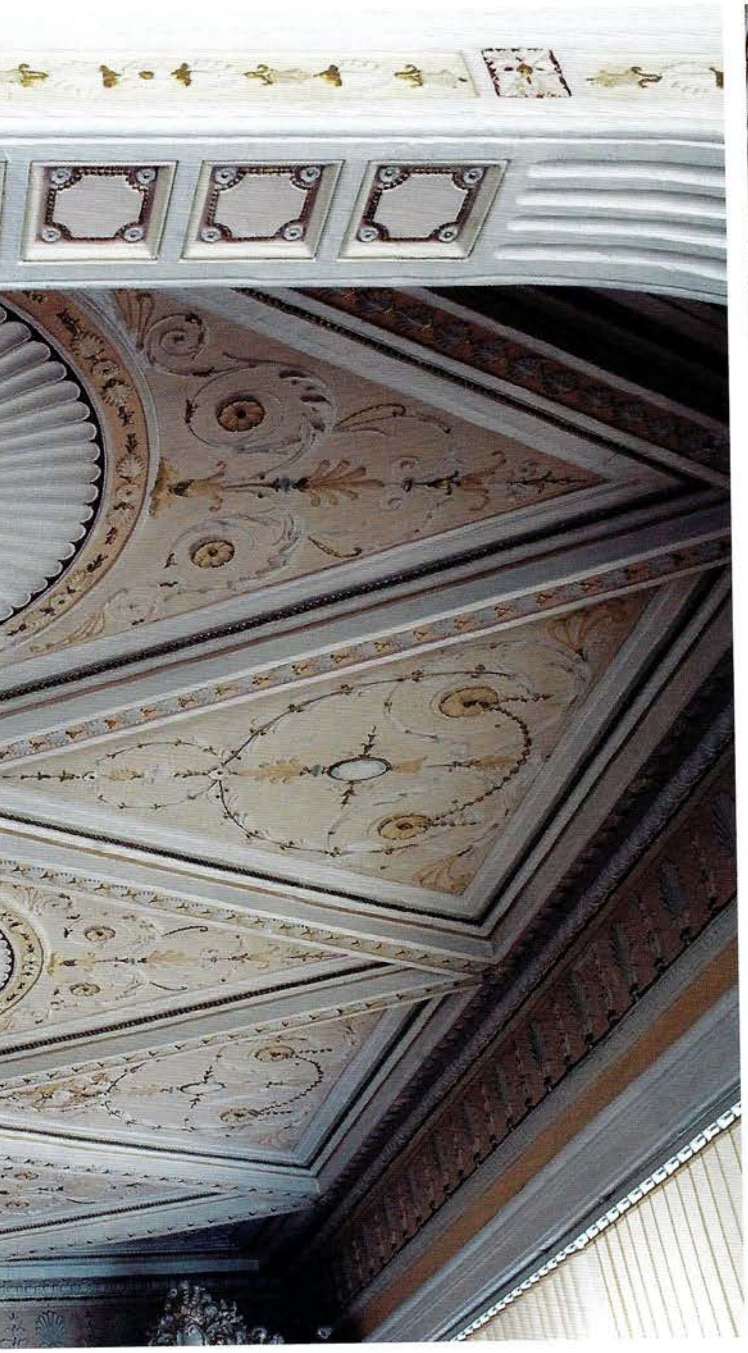
Brigid Keenan is the author of *Damascus: Hidden Treasures of the Old City* with photographs by Tim Beddow (Thames & Hudson, £35), which was featured in CORNUCOPIA 21 (see cornucopia.net)

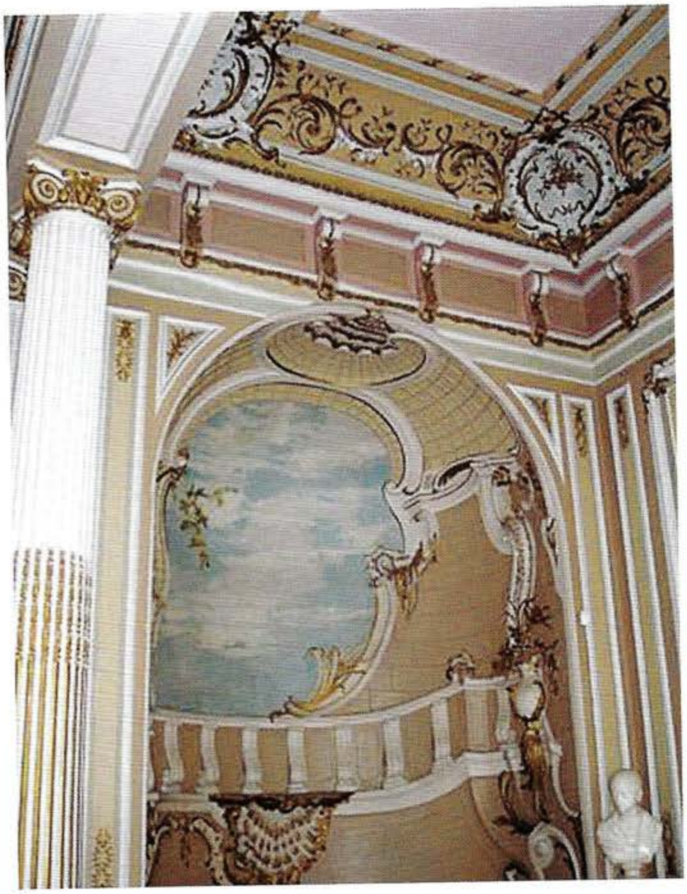


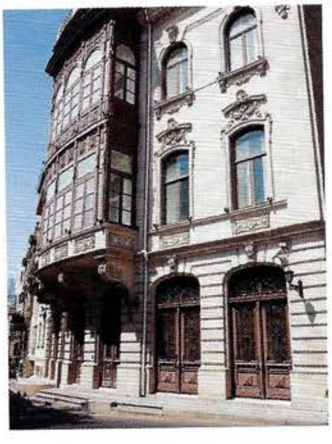


ABOVE THE ELABORATELY PAINTED CEILING IN THE OIL BARON IBRAHIMBEKOV'S HOUSE IN BAKU'S OLD CITY. THE AREA, ALSO KNOWN AS THE 'INNER CITY', IS A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

LEFT THE HOUSE THAT WAS THE CHARMING GEORGIAN EMBASSY, NOW DISFIGURED BY IRON STAIRCASES AND AN UGLY MURAL. IT IS DERELICT AND LOOKS AS IF IT MIGHT BE PULLED DOWN FOR REDEVELOPMENT



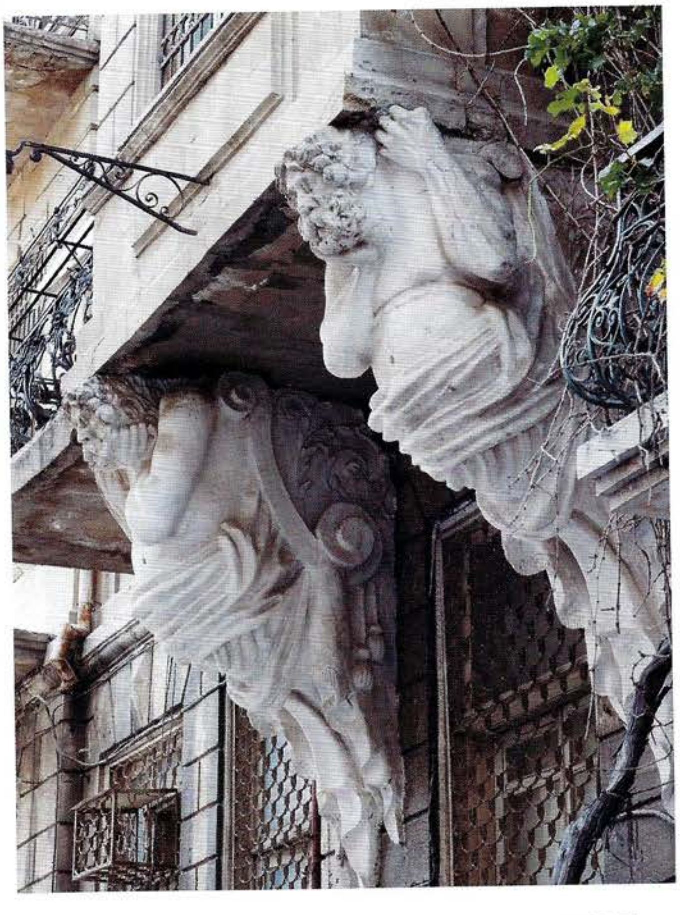


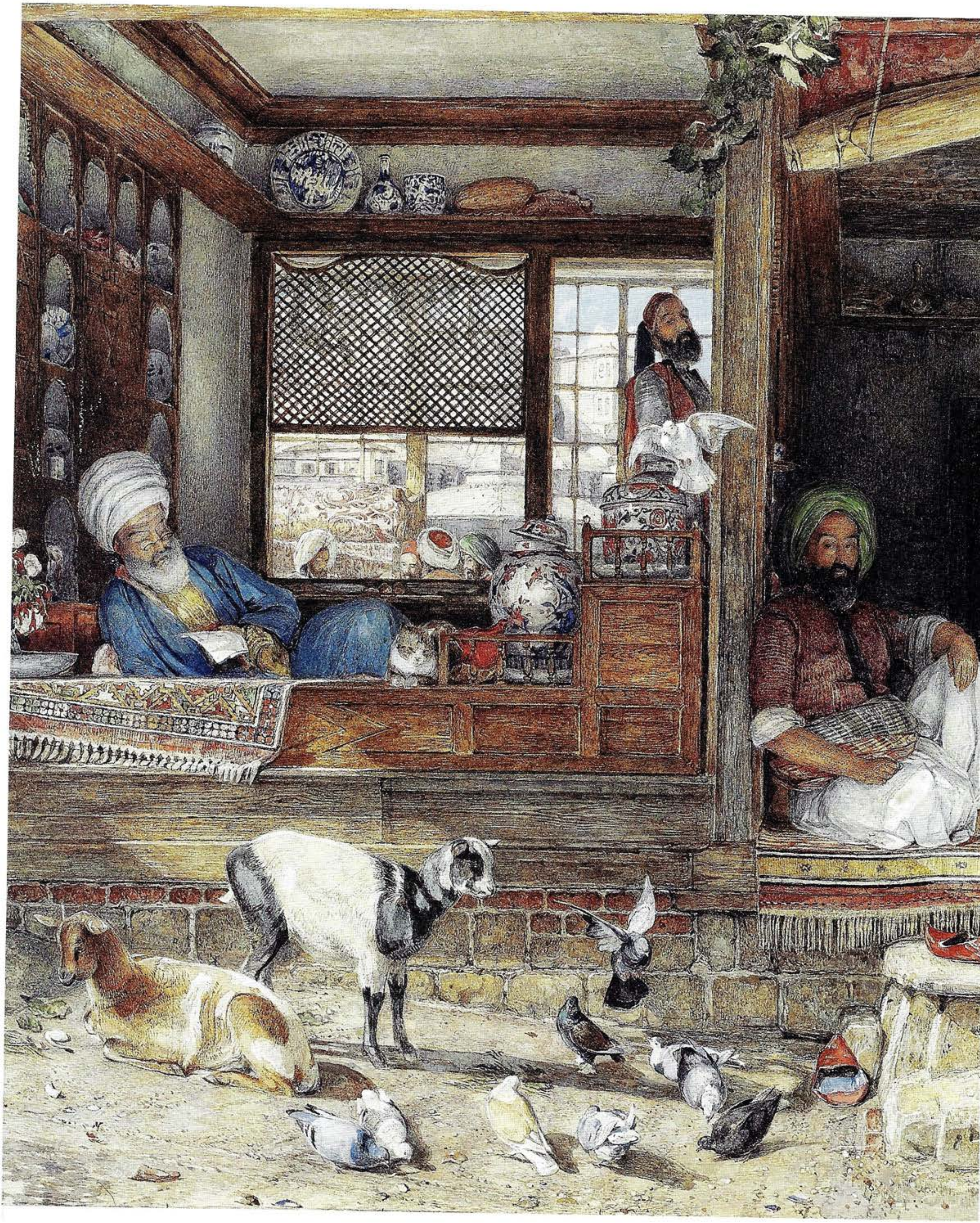


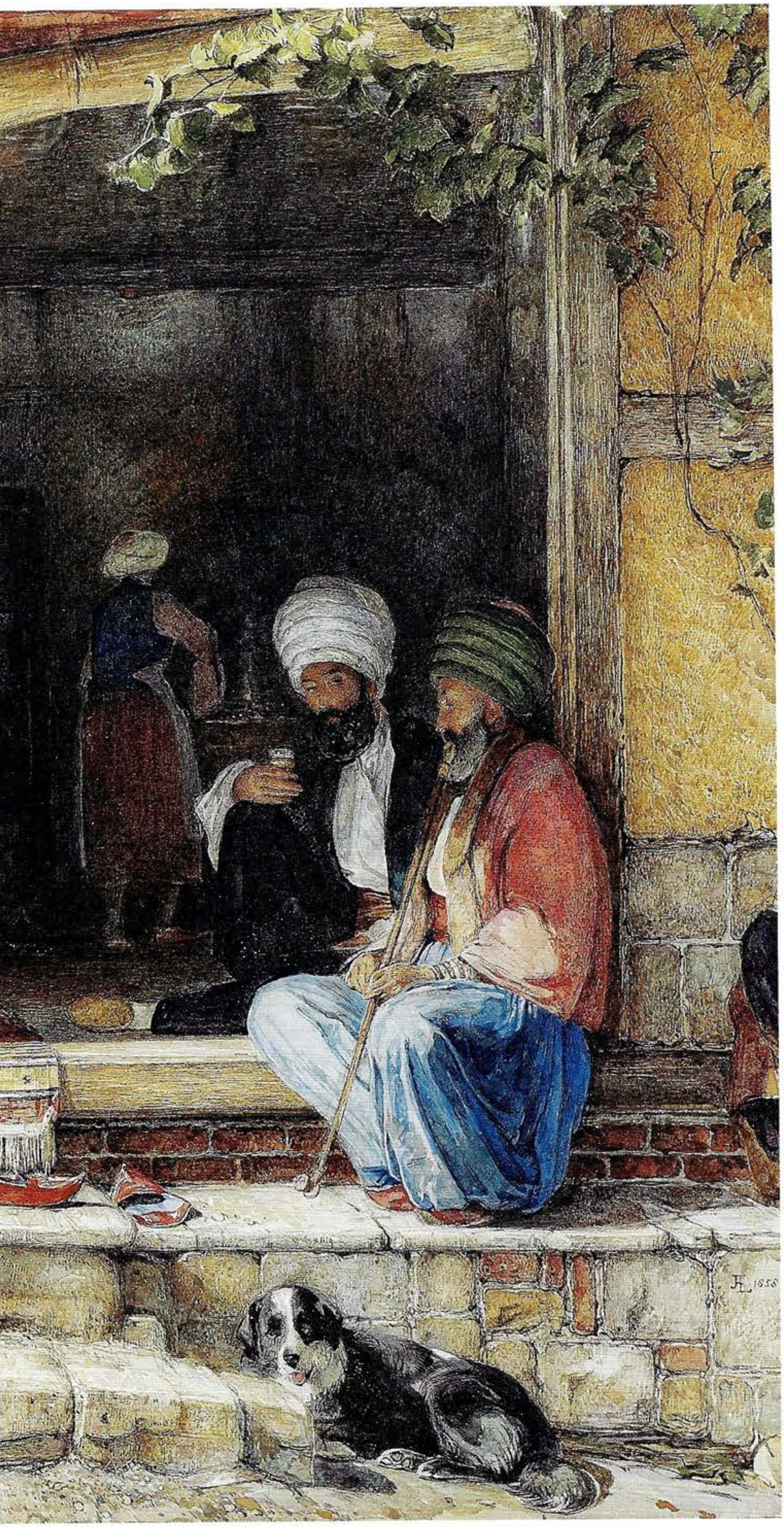
Far left and top right Painted ceilings and walls in the Rothschild mansion

Left The house built for the cotton merchant and shipowner Gani Mammadov in 1909 stood empty for two decades until Mobil rescued it in the late 1990s

Right Podgy Atlases support the balconies of a famous house next to the old Georgian embassy, but are their days numbered?





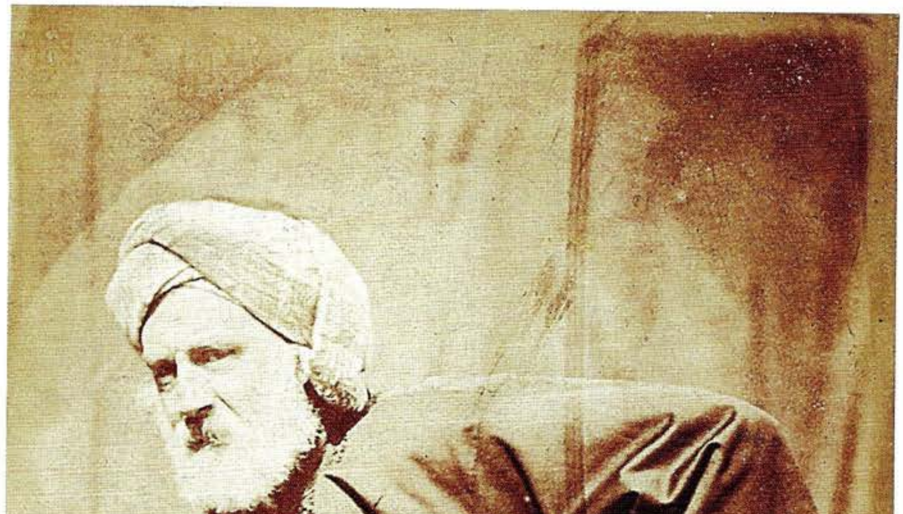


ÖMER M KOÇ COLLECTION

John Frederick Lewis (1804–76) was the supreme Orientalist, fêted for the sumptuous authenticity of his Ottoman scenes. Victorians loved the wealth of exotic detail in his work. The secret of his success over three decades, says Briony Llewellyn, lies in the vivid sketches of people and places he made during his time in the East

DRAWING FROM LIFE

A Kibab Shop, Scutari, Asia Minor
Watercolour and bodycolour, 1858
This scene of a kebab shop in Üsküdar (Scutari), on Istanbul's Asian shore, encapsulates the fascination that the 'exotic' East held for the West in the 19th century. When the very similar oil version (see this issue's Connoisseur) was exhibited in 1858, one critic remarked: 'He must paint with etching-needles, so thready are his coloured tissues, so perfect his embroideries'. Lewis's watercolours take two forms: highly worked compositions such as this one, and acutely observed preparatory sketches, which he continued to use as a basis for his works long after his return to London. Through the window can be seen the Fountain of Ahmet III on the quay of Üsküdar, which Lewis had sketched on the spot in 1840–41



PRIVATE COLLECTION, UK

John Frederick Lewis's glittering scenes of Oriental life were celebrated in his lifetime for the virtuosity of their execution and the perceived authenticity of their portrayal of Islamic society. His images of men and women opulently dressed in Oriental costume, within the confines of the well-to-do Ottoman home and outside in the streets of Cairo and Istanbul, as well as in the white heat of the Egyptian desert, were widely acknowledged as real representations of Oriental life. In 1865, the year he was elected a Royal Academician, a popular journal summed up the general belief that he was "in knowledge of Orientals quite one of themselves".

Since the publication of Edward Said's seminal book, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, in 1978, modern criticism has been less willing to accept Lewis's paintings at face value, and his Orientalist subject matter has at times been seen as Western fantasy, as politically subversive and as the embodiment of colonialist paternalism. More recently, some careful critical analysis has recognised that the complexities of Lewis's compositions defy the simplicities of the Saidian tunnel vision and he has been acknowledged as one of the most intriguing of all Orientalist artists.

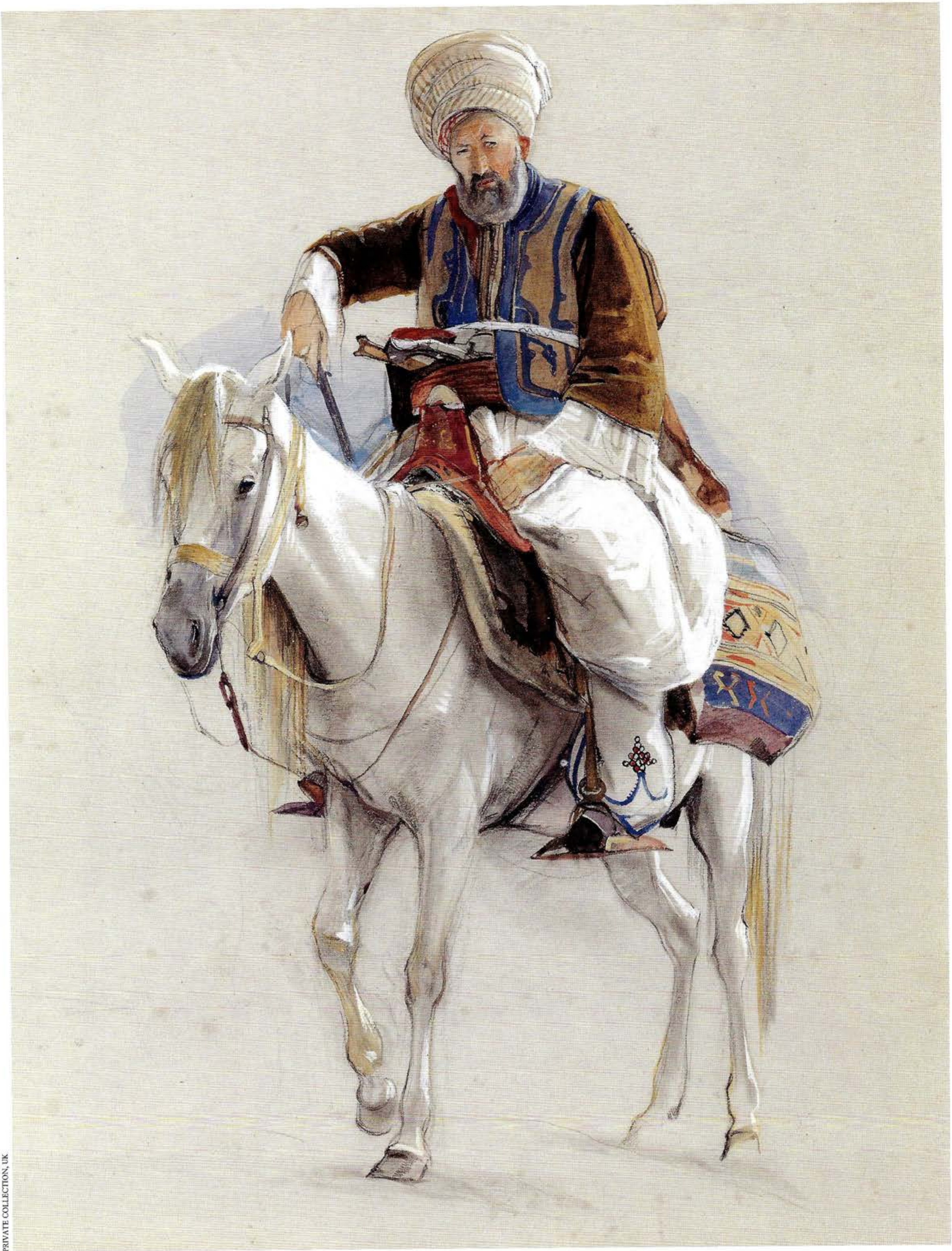
How did Lewis become the "eminent Oriental painter" that he was widely held to be, reigning supreme in this "special region of Art", to paraphrase another contemporary critic? Instead of just visiting the East, as many European artists did in the 19th century, he actually lived there for more than a decade. First he spent a year, 1840–41, in Istanbul and Bursa, then he travelled to Cairo, where he resided for nine years in an old "many-windowed, many-galleried" Ottoman-period house, as his friend William Makepeace Thackeray reported.

The brilliant essayist and novelist visited the artist there in 1844 and, in *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (1846), published a colourful, tongue-in-cheek account of Lewis's luxurious Eastern lifestyle, "going about with a great beard and crooked sword, dressed up like an odious Turk". Describing his "swarthy tawny attendant, dressed in blue, with white turban", his invitation to smoke from a "long pipe and a brass chafing dish", his dinners of "yellow smoking pilaffs; the pride of the Oriental cuisine" and his menagerie of exotic animals, Thackeray invested his friend with an Arabian Nights glamour – "a dreamy, hazy, lazy, tobaccofied life". The reality of his existence was undoubtedly more prosaic, but Lewis was not alone among European residents in wearing local dress and in adopting a hybrid lifestyle that occupied the overlapping borders of the cultural divide between East and West.

During the quarter-century that remained of his career after his return home to England in 1851, Lewis sought to re-create in paint the "terrestrial paradise" that he had left behind. Year after year, first at the Society of Painters in Water Colours, then at the Royal Academy, he exhibited watercolours and oil paintings of extraordinary intensity, remarkable for their meticulous detail, saturated colour and brilliant effects of light and shade. In each one he wove together a variety of cross-cultural threads in an apparently seamless composition, creating a hyperreal

△ LEWIS IN OTTOMAN DRESS
Albumen print, undated
This photograph of Lewis, taken in England, probably in the 1860s, when the artist himself was about 60, shows him in the Ottoman outfit described by Thackeray: 'an embroidered jacket and gaiters, and a pair of trousers, which would make a set of dresses for an English family. His beard curls nobly over his chest, his Damascus scimitar at his thigh'. He looks remarkably like the horseman he had sketched 20 years earlier (right)

▷ TURKISH SUROGEE
Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour, 1840/41
The 'sürücü', or 'surogees', were couriers who rode long distances to deliver messages across the Ottoman Empire. Traditionally of Tatar stock, they wore a distinctive embroidered felt waistcoat and riding chaps



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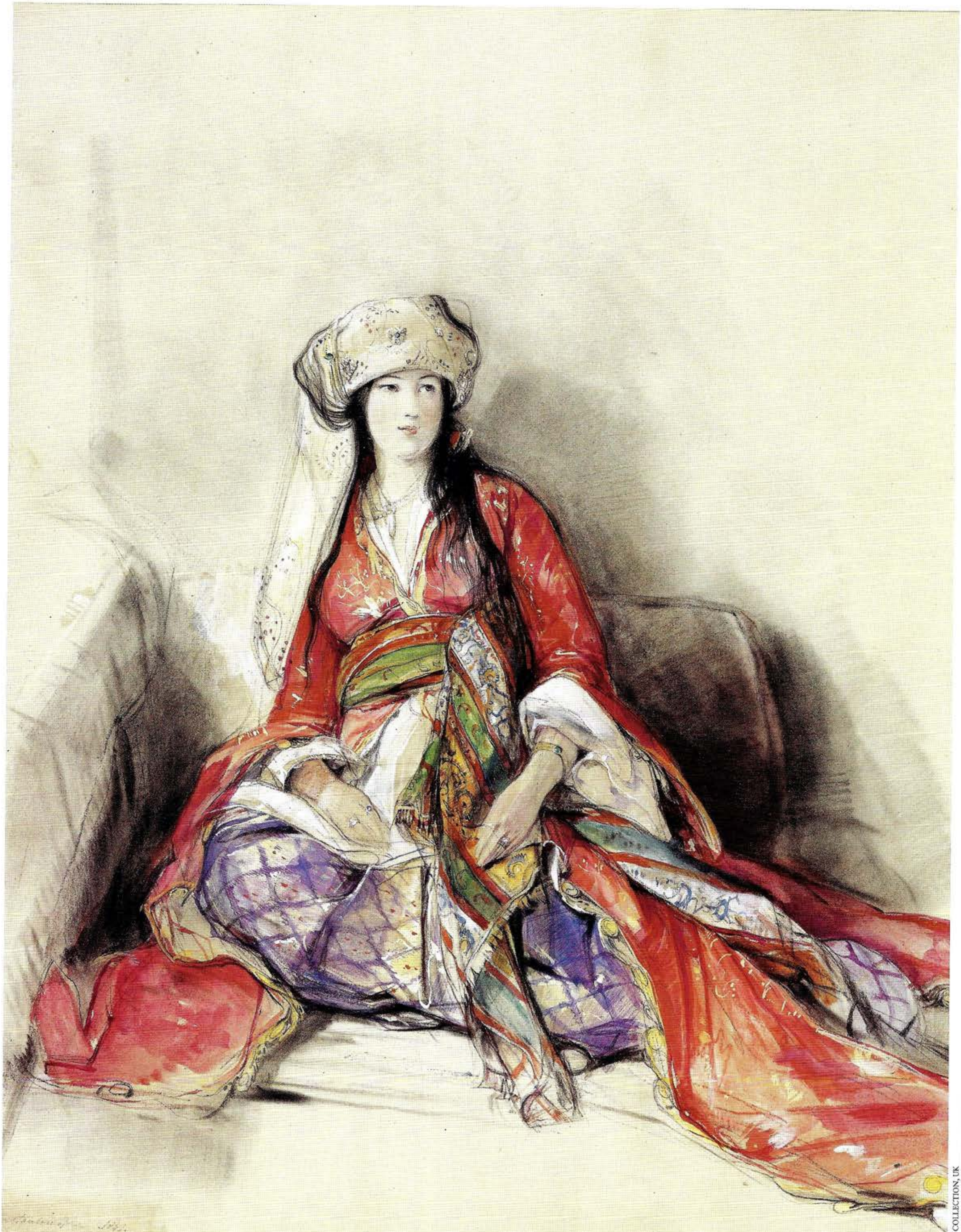


PRIVATE COLLECTION, UK

illusion of the Orient that both resonated with and challenged his Victorian public.

Take *A Kibab Shop, Scutari*, an oil much admired when Lewis exhibited it at the Royal Academy in 1858, seen here in the almost identical watercolour painted at the same time. It shows an eating house in Üsküdar, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, then known to foreign residents and visitors as Scutari, in which well-dressed men are seated, apparently awaiting their meal. In the murky interior a cook is making preparations over hot charcoal. The sleekly furred and feathered animals and birds in the foreground, the harmonious colour tonalities and the skilful interplay of diffused and radiant light, all exude a mood of calm contentment.

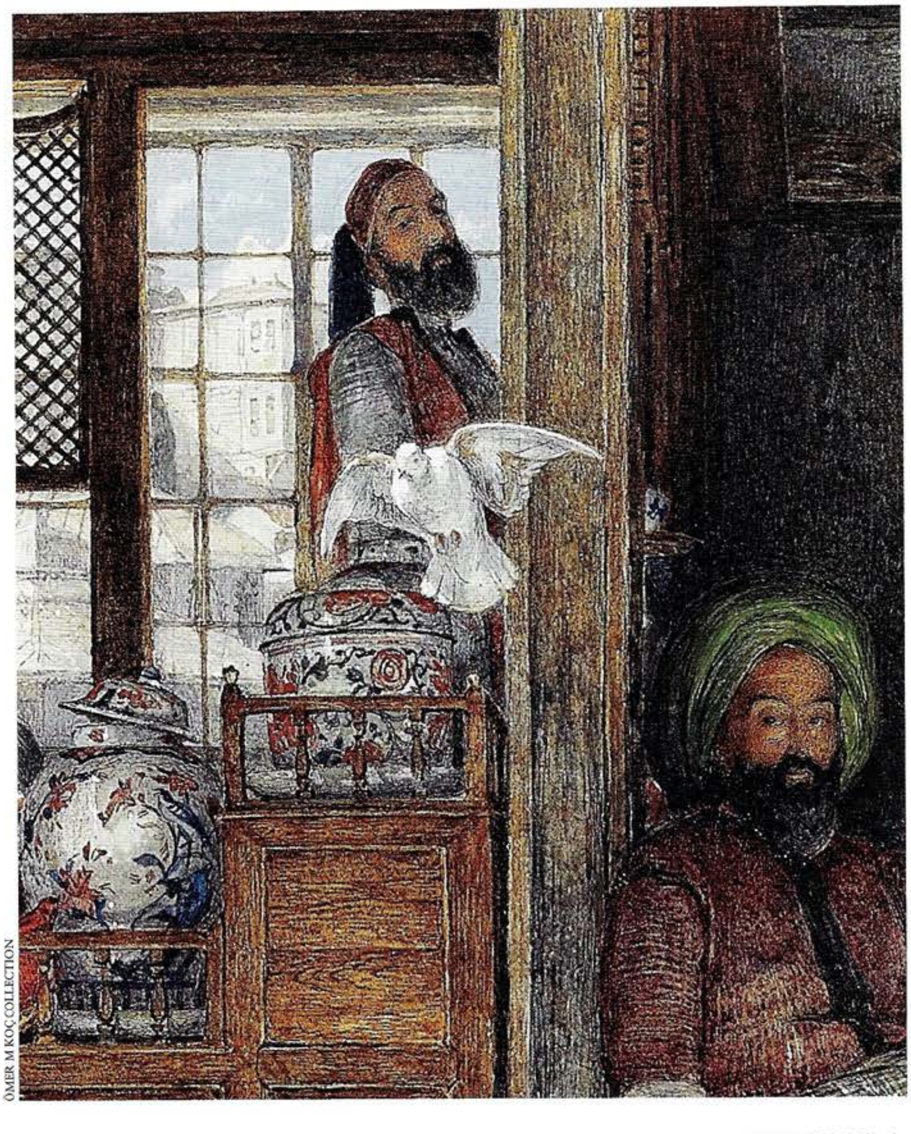
The scene encapsulates the fascination with which the "exotic" East was regarded by the West in the 19th century. Yet while Lewis is exploiting the familiar stereotype of Turkish men at ease, smoking pipes and drinking coffee, he is also perhaps equating them with the British men who frequented the gentlemen's clubs of London to meet, drink and discuss the affairs of the day.

Turkish cafés had been represented before by Western artists, but Lewis treats the subject with unprecedented realism, rendering in exquisite detail the textures and colours of stone, brick, wood, fur, feather, fabric and ceramic. At the same time he deliberately historicises the scene, portraying Turks in traditional Ottoman dress, years after reforms had decreed the wearing of the stambouline (cutaway frock coat) and fez for Ottoman officials, though many provincial and old-fashioned Turks were still wearing the flowing robes and turbans Lewis depicts. The profusion of objects in the left booth of the shop might seem gratuitously decorative, but superior eating places were indeed well appointed, with carved wood, rich textiles, and sometimes, as here, displays of Chinese and Japanese export ceramics.

Lewis further demonstrates his superior knowledge of the scene by placing it in a real location. Through the open window at the back of the shop can be seen the fountain of Ahmet III outside the mosque of Mihrimah Sultan (İskele Camii) in Üsküdar, which he had observed first-hand during his time in Istanbul in *Scutari, Stamboul* (page 68). The scene is thus both specific and generic. Painted in an English studio, far from Istanbul, it is by no means just a collection of models and studio props, but a cleverly knitted together tapestry of remembered reality.

◁ A CIRCASSIAN GIRL
Chalk, watercolour and bodycolour, 1840
The girl's costume, a splendid red entari over purple shalwar, is stunningly portrayed by Lewis; tiny blobs of white and coloured paint sparkle over its surface. Many upper-class Ottoman families would have Circassian women as part of the household. They came from the Caucasus at the eastern end of the Black Sea

Yet on closer scrutiny, as with so many of Lewis's compositions, this reality becomes an unsettlingly shifting one. Just what are these individuals doing? Since they seem to be merchants of various kinds, is there a narrative centred on a commercial deal? Such a subject might appeal to the middle-class collectors, newly rich from their trade in commodities, who bought Lewis's paintings. Or is it a moment frozen in time, with no meaning whatsoever? Since the features of the figure in the background poised between two shop-booths recall those of the artist himself, are we to assume his presence in the pictorial space, involved but aloof, observing and observed, manipulating the figures within the image as well as his public who viewed it? Such are the puzzles and complexities, both



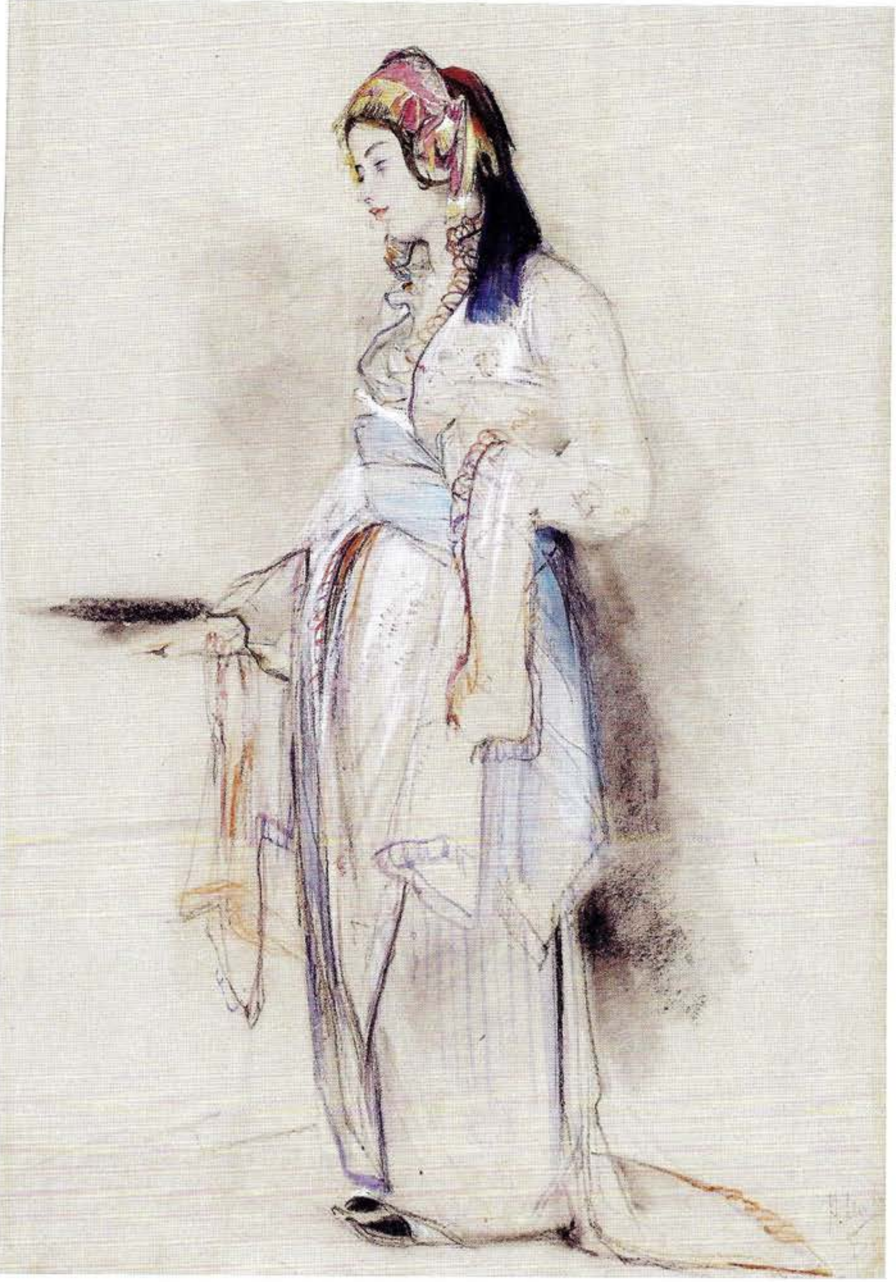
▽ DETAIL OF 'A KIBAB SHOP, SCUTARI'
A figure poised between two worlds. The waiter in a Mecidiyen long-tasselled fez observing the viewer from the dark interior bears an uncanny resemblance to Lewis himself

ÖMER M KOÇ COLLECTION

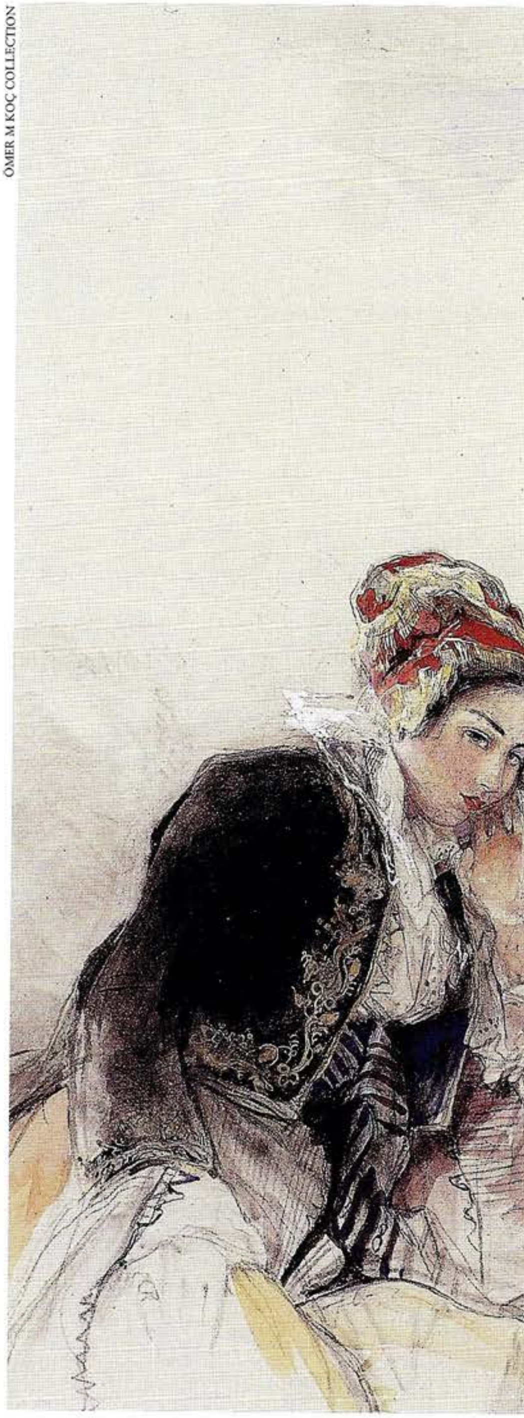
physical and metaphorical, with which we are confronted when viewing Lewis's art.

Underpinning the cleverly staged constructed "reality" of such studio productions were Lewis's directly observed watercolour drawings of the real scenes and people encountered on his travels. He exhibited these in London as soon as he returned home, deliberately advertising his first-hand experience of his subjects and reinforcing his claim to authenticity in the pictures he created for the art market. Among these sketches are likely to have been the many that he made during the 13 months or so that he was in Istanbul and Bursa.

Remarkable for their fluency and vitality, they were admired by Lewis's fellow artist Sir David Wilkie, who was in Istanbul at the same time: "He has been making most clever drawings, as usual." There is evidence that these two artists, each of whom had already achieved popular and critical acclaim in his own sphere, were



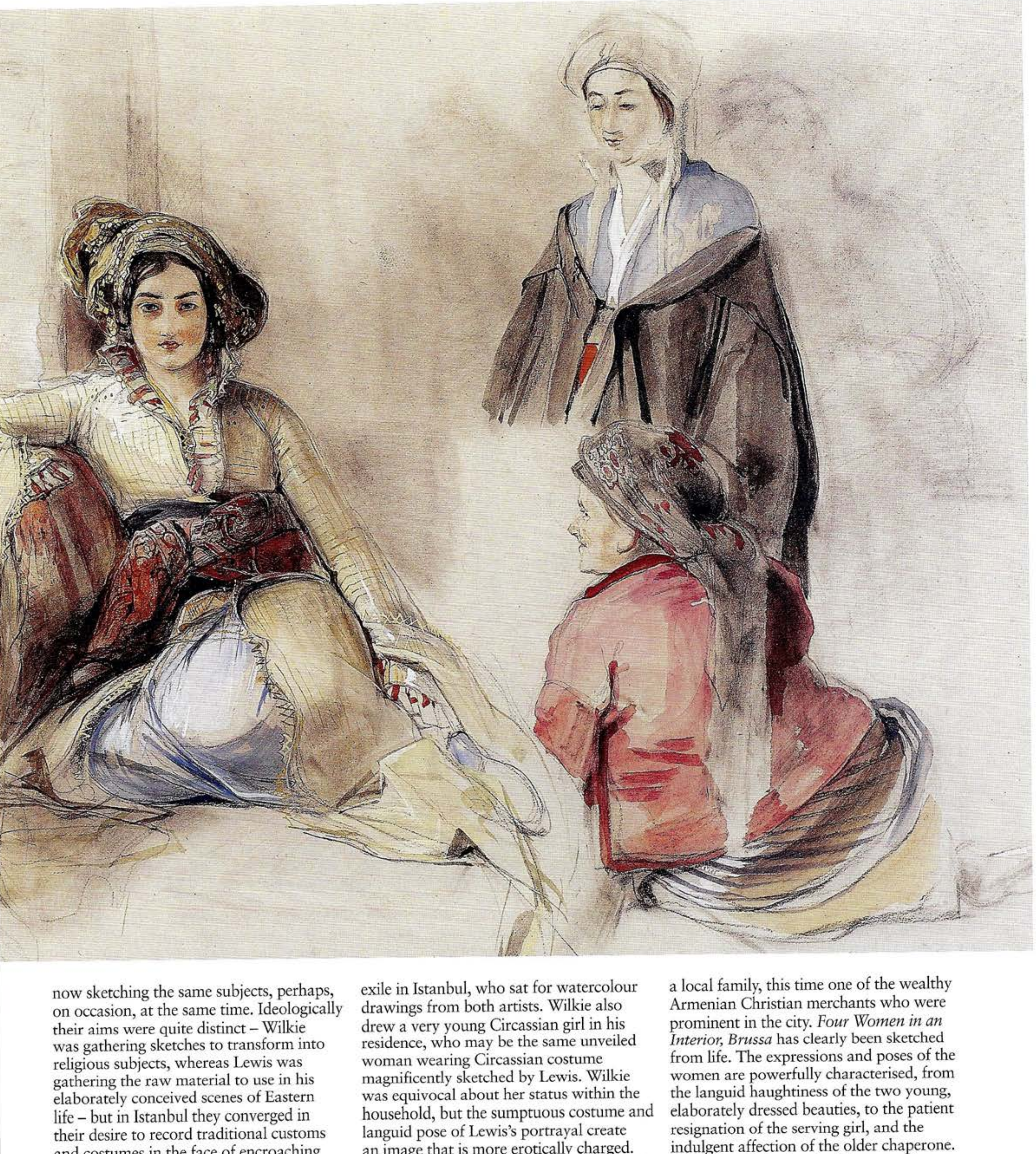
STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART, LONDON



ÖMER M KOÇ COLLECTION

△ Four women in an interior, Brussa
Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour, 1841
Lewis again places great emphasis on costume, depicting the folds and textures of the women's clothes with great accuracy. Clothes here differentiate the social status of the women, who are clearly members of a close-knit, probably Armenian family

◁ A Young Woman, Brussa
Chalk, watercolour and bodycolour, 1841
This sultry beauty is one of the women of the family Lewis depicted in Bursa. She is probably the seated figure on the far left in the sketch above



now sketching the same subjects, perhaps, on occasion, at the same time. Ideologically their aims were quite distinct – Wilkie was gathering sketches to transform into religious subjects, whereas Lewis was gathering the raw material to use in his elaborately conceived scenes of Eastern life – but in Istanbul they converged in their desire to record traditional customs and costumes in the face of encroaching Western culture.

As Western males, their access to Muslim domestic life was restricted, but on one occasion at least they were admitted to the "hidden domicile of a great Persian", as Wilkie wrote. This was Prince Hulaku Mirza, a cousin of the Shah, then living in exile in Istanbul, who sat for watercolour drawings from both artists. Wilkie also drew a very young Circassian girl in his residence, who may be the same unveiled woman wearing Circassian costume magnificently sketched by Lewis. Wilkie was equivocal about her status within the household, but the sumptuous costume and languid pose of Lewis's portrayal create an image that is more erotically charged. Women from Circassia, at the eastern end of the Black Sea, were the most highly prized members of upper-class Ottoman households.

When Lewis travelled to Bursa (which he knew as Brussa), he seems once more to have gained admittance to the home of a local family, this time one of the wealthy Armenian Christian merchants who were prominent in the city. *Four Women in an Interior, Brussa* has clearly been sketched from life. The expressions and poses of the women are powerfully characterised, from the languid haughtiness of the two young, elaborately dressed beauties, to the patient resignation of the serving girl, and the indulgent affection of the older chaperone.

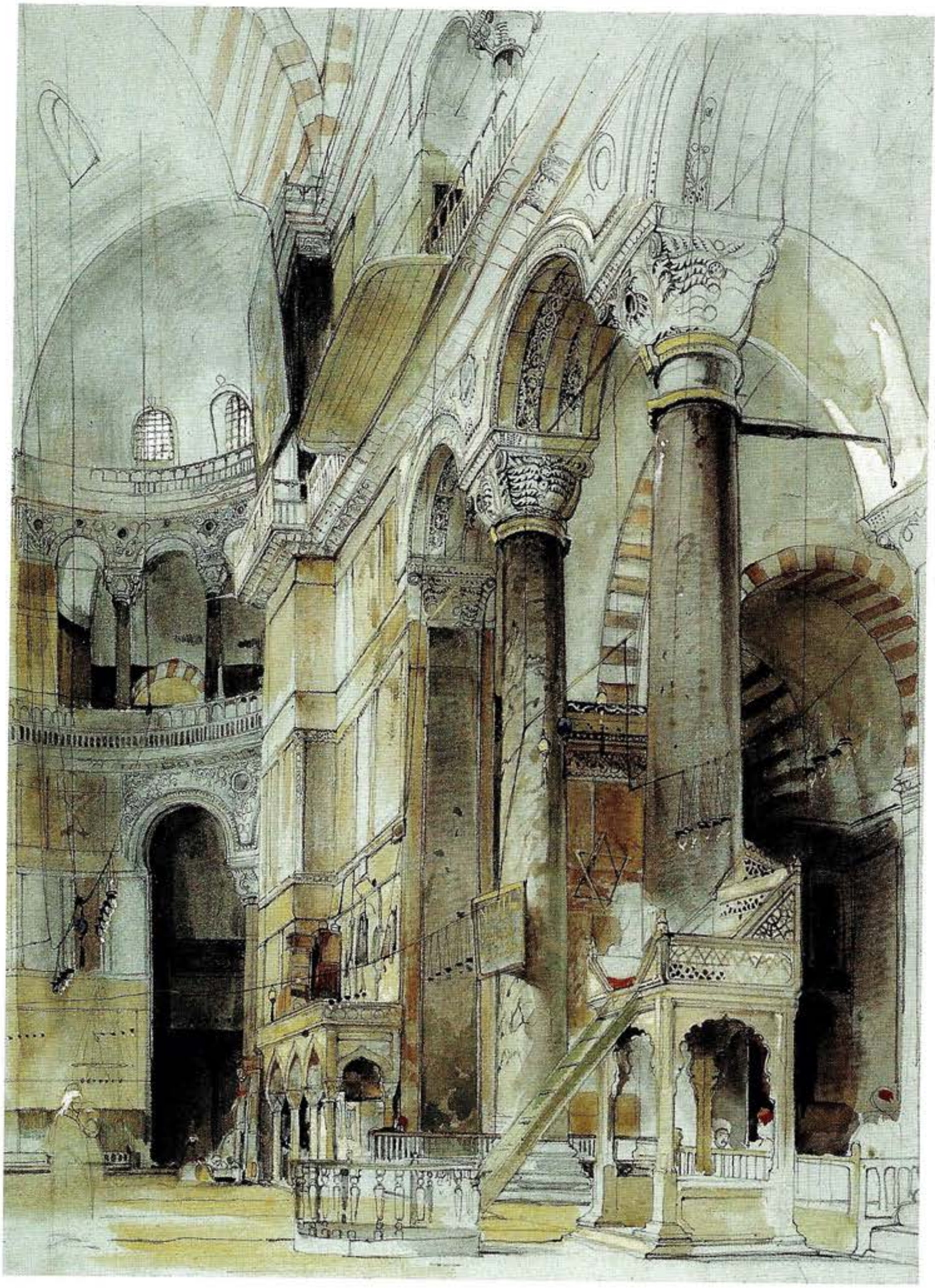
Unlike Wilkie, Lewis did not confine himself to figure studies, but took every opportunity to explore and sketch the buildings of old "Stamboul". When Lady Londonderry, then visiting Istanbul with her husband, the third Marquis, obtained a *firman* from Mustafa Reşit Pasha to visit the imperial mosques and Topkapı Palace, Lewis joined her party. He made several magnificent watercolour sketches of Aya Sofya, which capture with extraordinary accuracy the vast interior space and complex architectural forms of the Emperor Justinian's great sixth-century building.

His acuity is equally evident in drawings of other mosques in the city, such as Sultan Ahmet Camii and Beyazıd Camii. In the latter, his delicately rendered pencil framework is given substance by the judicious use of white highlights and touches of colour, filling the scene with light and atmosphere. He has observed the busy commercial life of the courtyard and the separation of men and women, entering and emerging from the mosque through different doors.

From the number and variety of his subjects, Lewis must also have made his own independent expeditions to the old city. His fascination with the bustle of modern city life in conjunction with its architectural heritage is evident in sketches of the Avrat Pazarı (Slave Market), the Mısır Çarşısı (Egyptian Market or Spice Bazaar) and the nearby Yeni Cami, all remarkable for their spontaneity and vitality and far removed from the stereotypical Western views of the city popularised in earlier prints. His choice of subject and angle of vision were not dictated by fashionable taste but by a desire to portray people and places not seen before in the West. His drawings seem to have been executed rapidly, but include sufficient detail to capture the essence of the scene, standing as works of art in their own right, not just as the raw material for later paintings.

With sketches such as these, Lewis was able to demonstrate the veracity of his experience of the East, a quality much prized by his contemporaries. For the 25 years of his life after his return from Cairo, he used them to inform his paintings, not just structurally, but ideologically, as an authority on Islamic society. They were the touchstone to which he referred when fusing together with such subtlety his constructions of Oriental society. Few Western artists have matched the consummate skill of these drawings and their ability to bring the 19th-century East to life. ◆

Briony Llewellyn, an independent scholar, has published extensively on British artists' depictions of the Near and Middle East. She has made a special study of JF Lewis. bjl@btinternet com

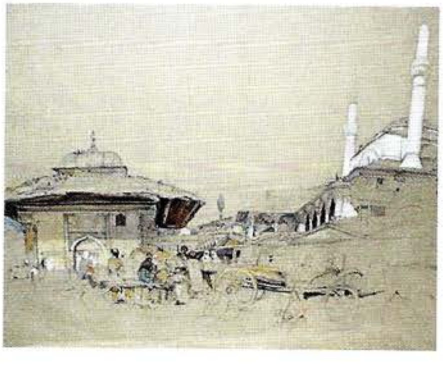


PRIVATE COLLECTION COURTESY OF THE FINE ART SOCIETY, LOND

△ Santa Sophia, Constantinople
Pencil, watercolour and bodycolour, 1840/41
Lewis shows a clear grasp of the complex interplay of space and form in Aya Sofya's vast interior, and seems to focus on the contrast between the Islamic and Byzantine structures

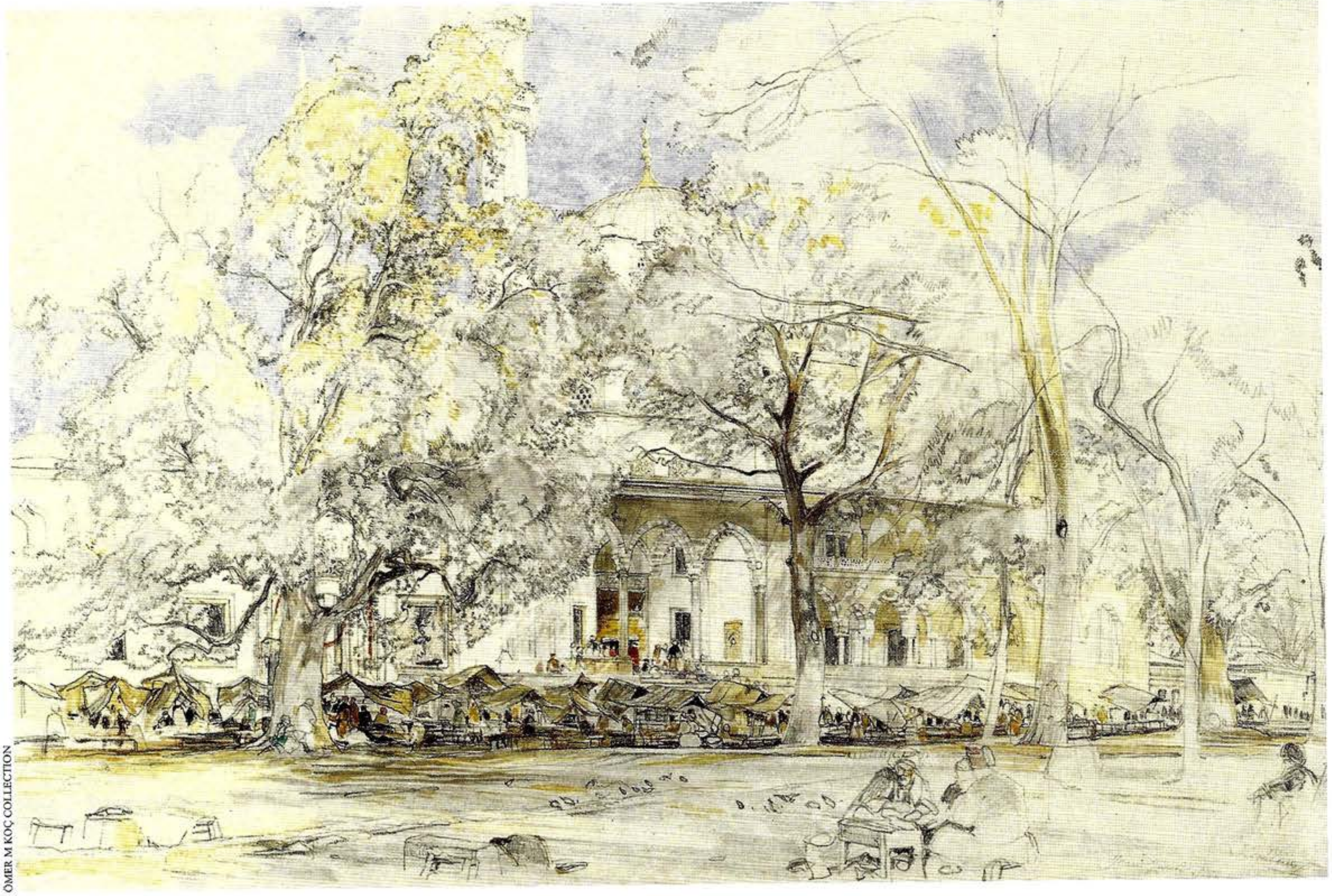
▷ Yeni Jami, Stamboul
Pencil and watercolour, 1840/41
Masterly use of pencil and watercolour to delineate the huge trees, the market stalls and the mosque itself (the Yeni Cami) creates a composition of great energy and fluency

▷ Court of the Mosque of Bajazet
Pencil and watercolour, heightened with white, 1840/41
White highlights and touches of colour give substance to a delicate pencil framework in this study of the imperial Beyazıd Mosque



NEWPORT MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

◁ Scutari, Stamboul
Pencil and watercolour, heightened with white, 1840/41
With a few incisive lines and touches of colour, Lewis captures the atmosphere of the busy square by the ferry landing in Üsküdar



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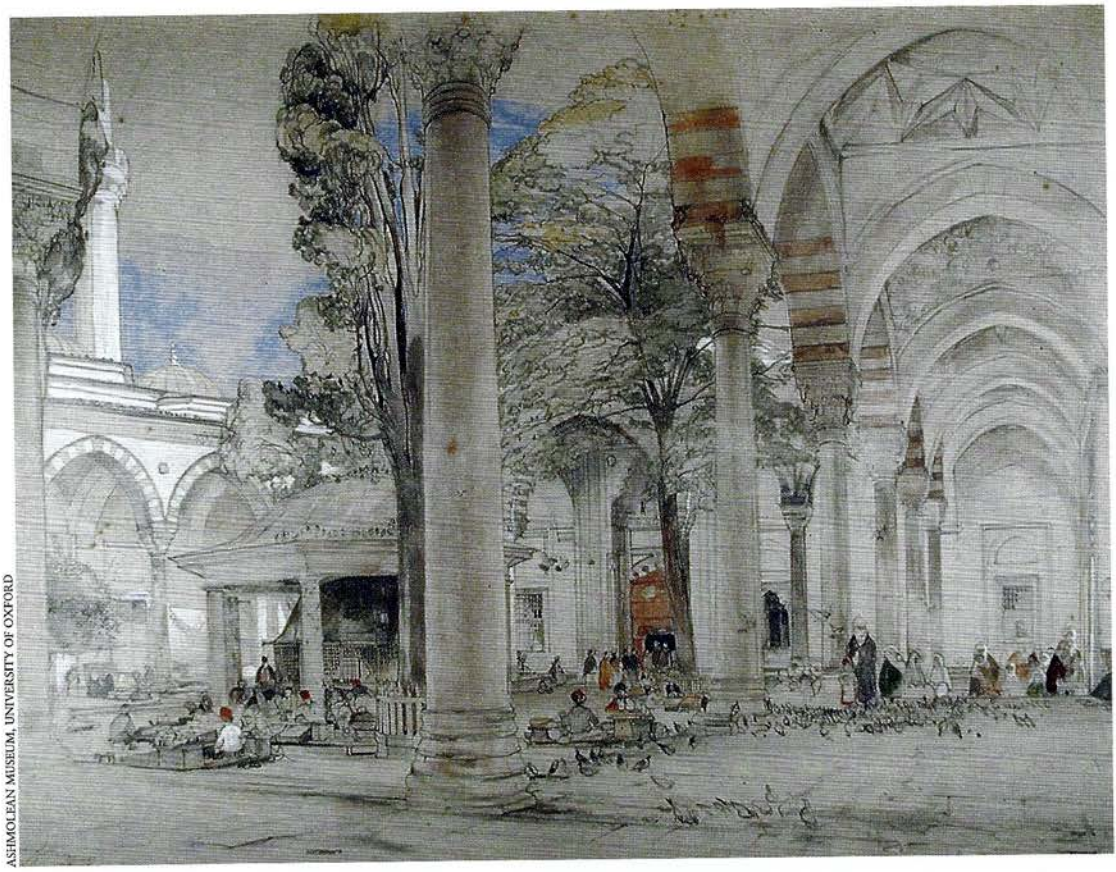


ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

EXHIBITIONS

This year, two important exhibitions in London explore the qualities of fluency and immediacy that watercolour offers artists.

WATERCOLOUR
at Tate Britain
(February 16 – August 21)
tate.org.uk/britain

LIFE, LEGEND, LANDSCAPE
Victorian Watercolours and Landscapes
at the Courtauld Galleries
(February 17 – May 15)
courtauld.ac.uk/gallery

In 2012:
VOYAGE TO CONSTANTINOPLE
at the Sadberk Hanım Museum, Istanbul, will include the JF Lewis watercolours in the Ömer M Koç Collection
sadberkhanimmuzesi.org.tr

For Orientalist exhibitions in Doha, Munich and Madrid, see this issue's *Connoisseur*

THE KEY TO

KASTAMONU

A century of benign neglect has saved Kastamonu's treasures

This forgotten corner of the Black Sea – both the province and its capital, which share a name – is just waiting to be discovered. There are beautiful mountains with stunning walks, crumbling mansions, ancient tombs, comfortable town-house hotels, fortifying farmhouse breakfasts – in short, all the ingredients CORNUCOPIA readers look for. It even has an unspoilt coastline, where Turks go for old-fashioned seaside holidays

CORNUCOPIA'S 50-page celebration of Kastamonu is the result of a visit to the area by the magazine's publisher, Berrin Torolsan, and the photographer Solvi dos Santos – the team behind the splendid Thames & Hudson book *At Home in Turkey* – and the local historian and archaeologist Murat Karasalihoğlu. Designed to act as an inspiration for the independent traveller, it illustrates four ways to savour the area on a short trip

PAGE 72 THE OTTOMAN FARMHOUSE
A visit to a lovely but unpretentious old Ottoman farmhouse where the family live in traditional style and welcome guests with organic food grown on the estate
PAGE 86 A TOWN OF MANY MANSIONS
A stroll round the town of Kastamonu, with its hundreds of historic konaks, and a glimpse of a bygone way of life
PAGE 98 THE QUIET COAST
A trip from Kastamonu over dramatic mountains down to the sleepy seaside town of İnebolu
PAGE 106 THE PAINTED MOSQUE
A visit to a small gem in a remote setting ten miles out of town: the unique 14th-century wooden mosque of Mahmut Bey

PLUS: KASTAMONU TRAVEL NOTES, PAGE 116
A quick guide to where to eat, where to stay and what to buy

Photographs by Solvi dos Santos

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS FEATURE ARE BY SOLVI DOS SANTOS EXCEPT WHERE STATED

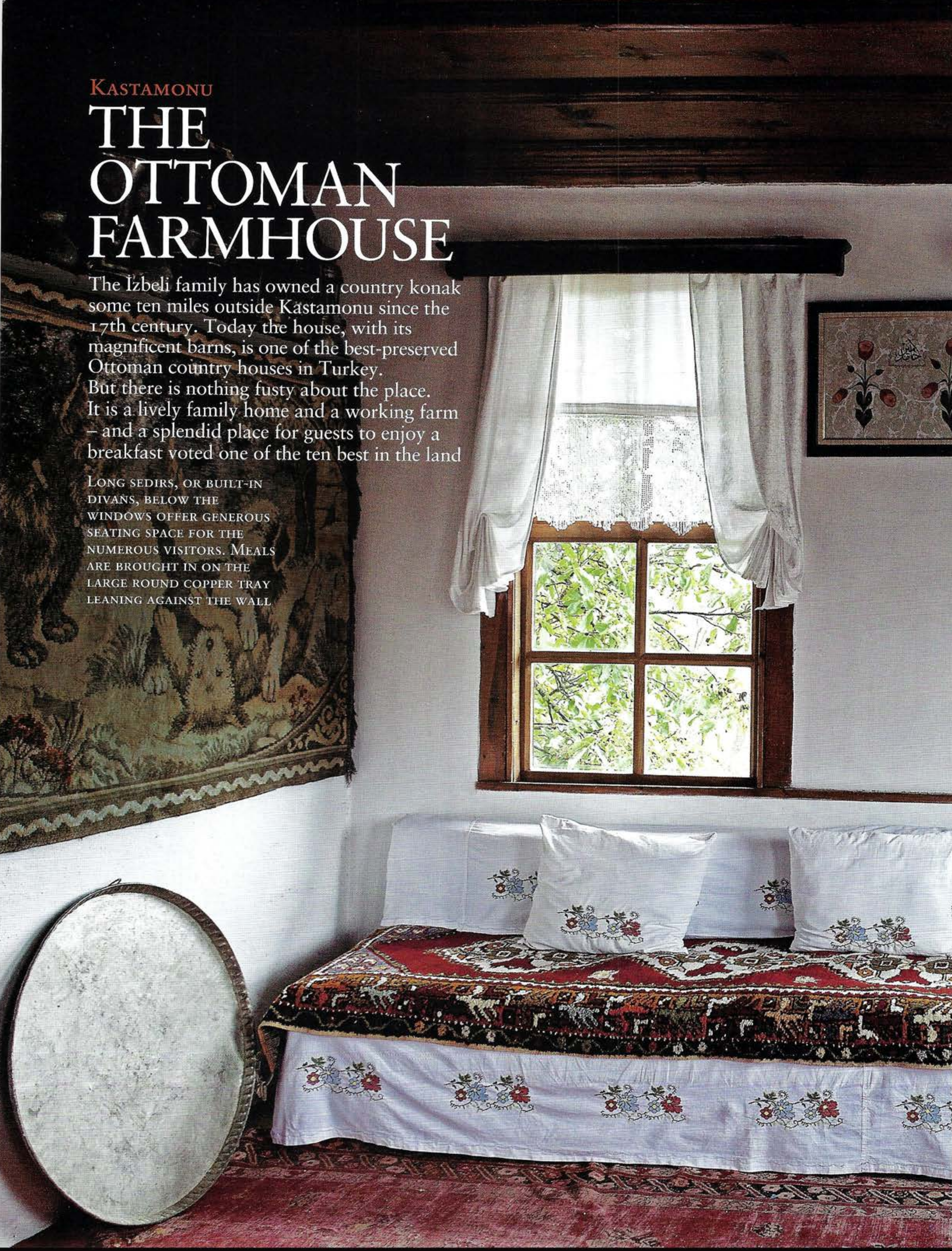
Kastamonu is a swift five-hour drive from Istanbul – but in temperament it is a far cry. Encircled by mountains and bordered by a coastline that has only recently become accessible, the region has never lost its spirit or its identity. It has kept its customs, its values and its country charm. A province that grew rich on its Silk Road connections and its copper, timber and flax, in the 20th century it saw a gradual decline. Today, prosperity is in the air again, but for good or for bad? If care is taken of its heritage, still tantalisingly visible, Kastamonu's fame could outstrip that of its illustrious neighbour Safranbolu. It could even become Turkey's Tuscany

MURAT KARASALIHOĞLU

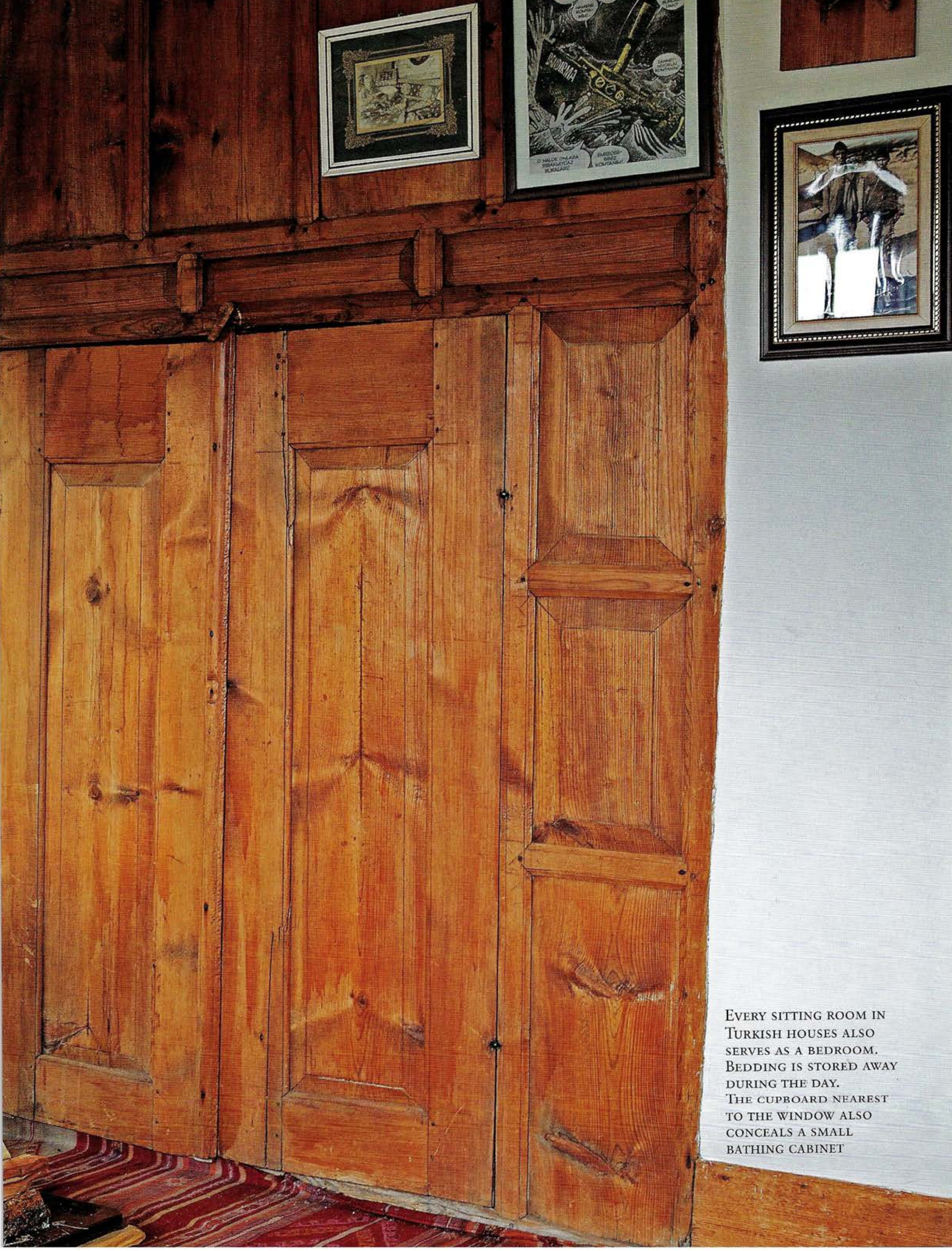
KASTAMONU

THE OTTOMAN FARMHOUSE

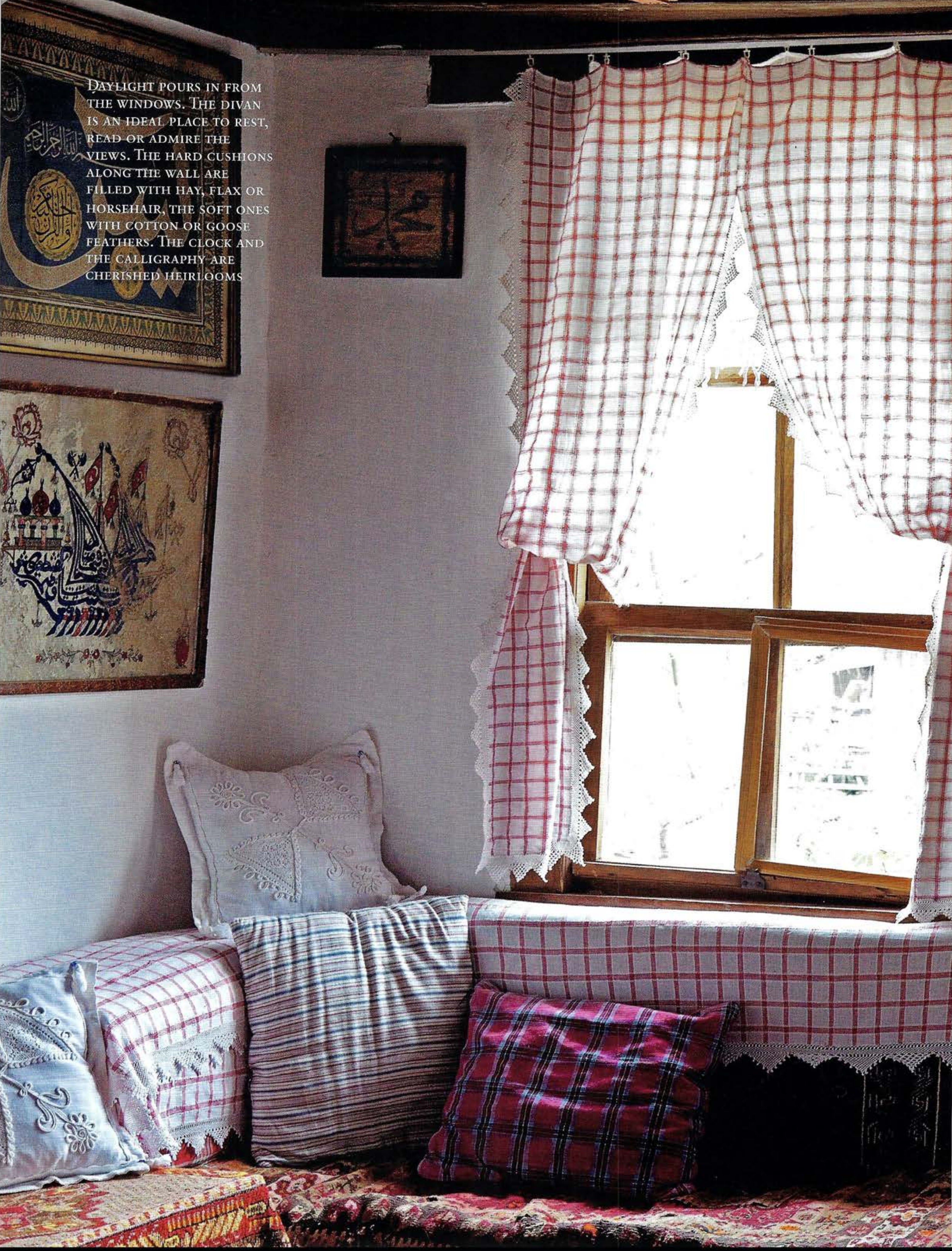
The İzbeli family has owned a country konak some ten miles outside Kastamonu since the 17th century. Today the house, with its magnificent barns, is one of the best-preserved Ottoman country houses in Turkey.
But there is nothing fusty about the place.
It is a lively family home and a working farm – and a splendid place for guests to enjoy a breakfast voted one of the ten best in the land



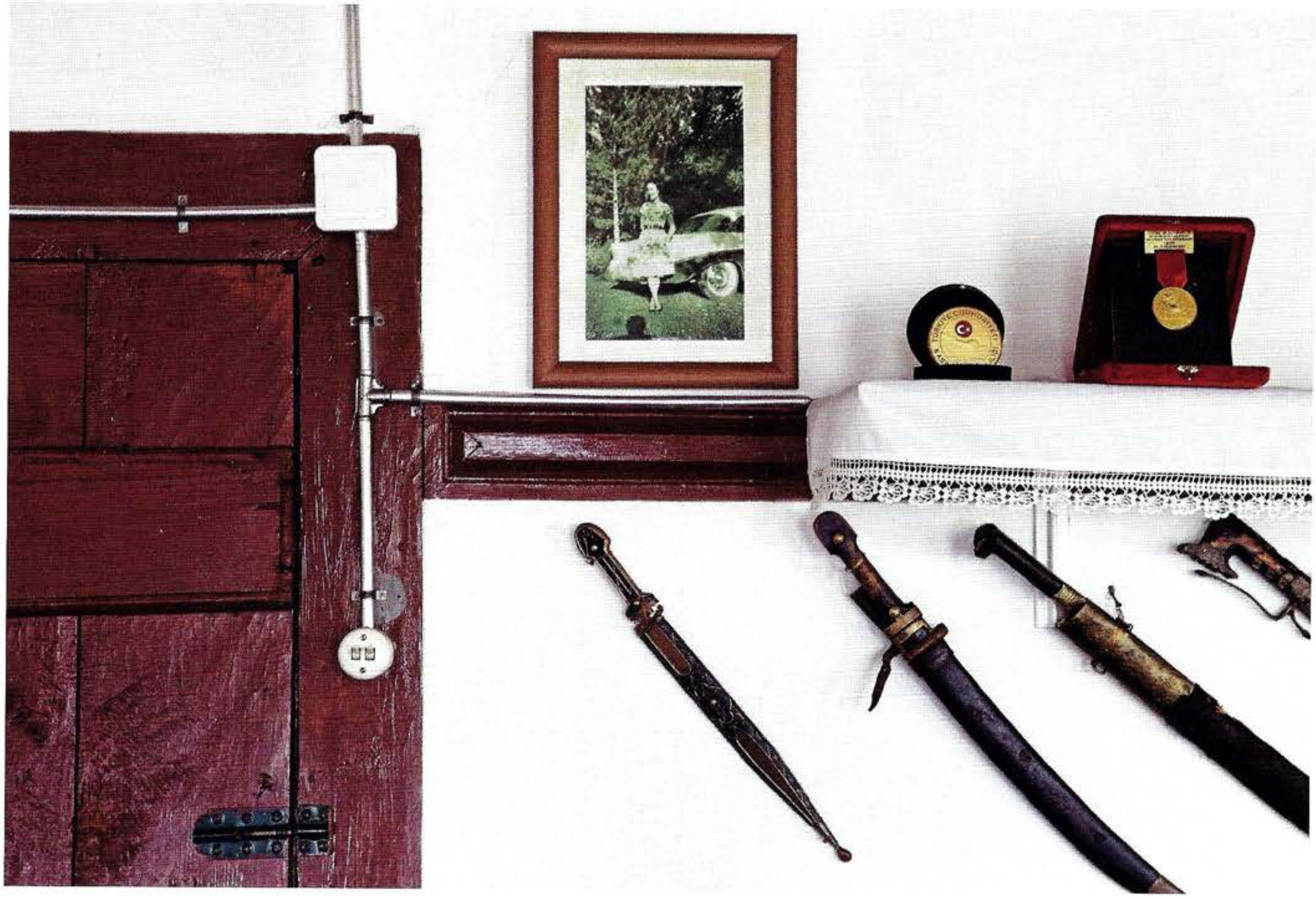
Long sedirs, or built-in divans, below the windows offer generous seating space for the numerous visitors. Meals are brought in on the large round copper tray leaning against the wall



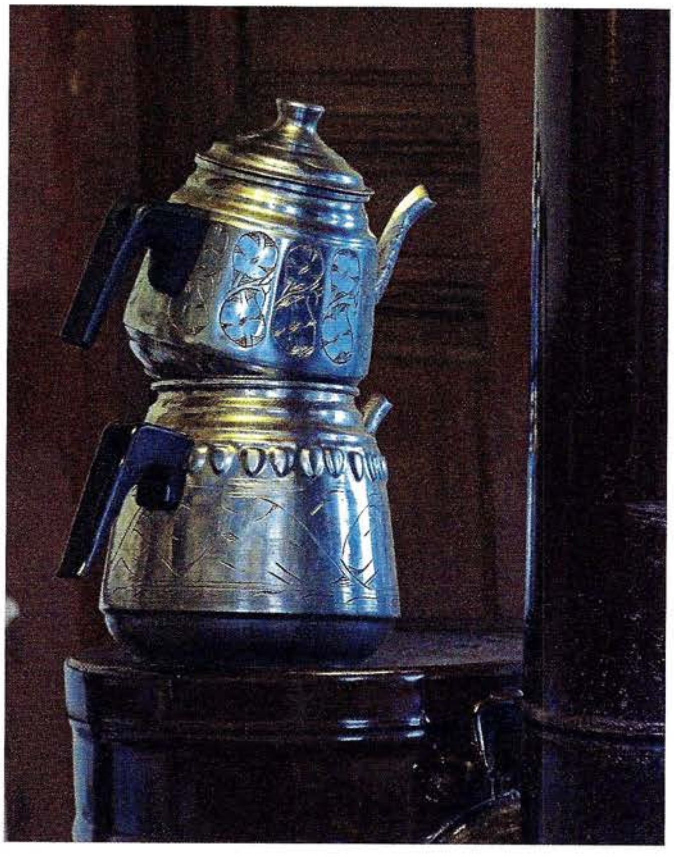
Every sitting room in Turkish houses also serves as a bedroom. Bedding is stored away during the day. The cupboard nearest to the window also conceals a small bathing cabinet



Daylight pours in from the windows. The divan is an ideal place to rest, read or admire the views. The hard cushions along the wall are filled with hay, flax or horsehair, the soft ones with cotton or goose feathers. The clock and the calligraphy are cherished heirlooms

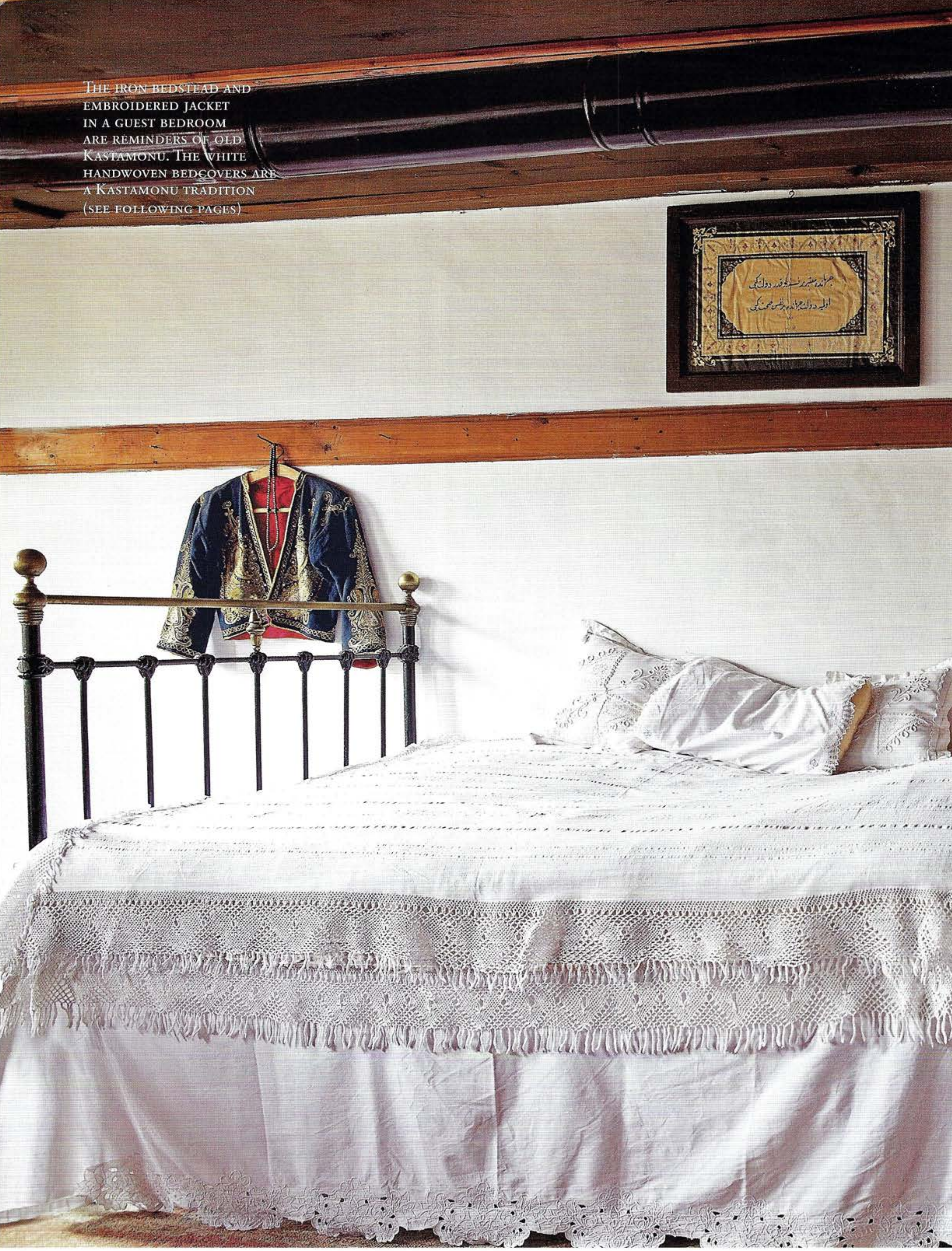


ABOVE SABIHA İZBELI, THE PRESENT OWNER, PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE 1960S WITH THE FAMILY GAS-GUZZLER. THE MEDALS ON THE SHELF WERE GIVEN TO HER OVER THE YEARS FOR SERVICES TO MIDWIFERY, CHARITY WORK AND, LATELY, TOURISM. THE COLLECTION OF ARMS, INCLUDING A SCIMITAR AND 'YATAĞAN' DAGGERS, BELONGED TO FOREBEARS IN THE OTTOMAN TIMARIOT CAVALRY.
OPPOSITE A CRUCIFORM HALLWAY SEPARATES THE FOUR CORNER ROOMS IN TRADITIONAL FASHION. THIS INVITING DIVAN, WITH ITS BRASS 'MANGAL', OR BRAZIER, IS AT ONE END OF THE HALLWAY
RIGHT A TURKISH TEAPOT IS GENTLY BUBBLING ON A WOOD-BURNING STOVE – EACH ROOM HAS ONE, AND IT TAKES ONLY A MINUTE FOR THE ROOM TO BE AS WARM AS TOAST

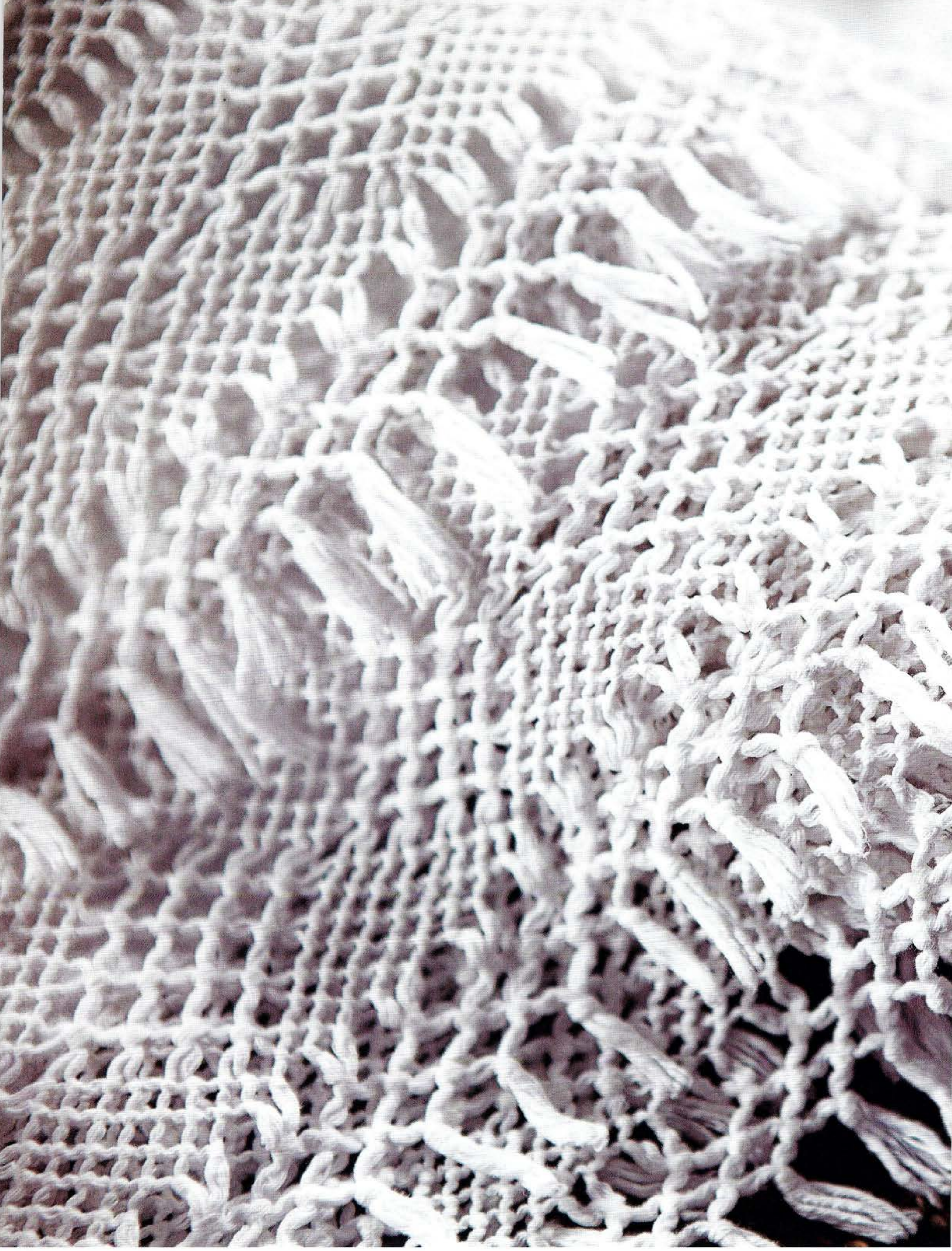


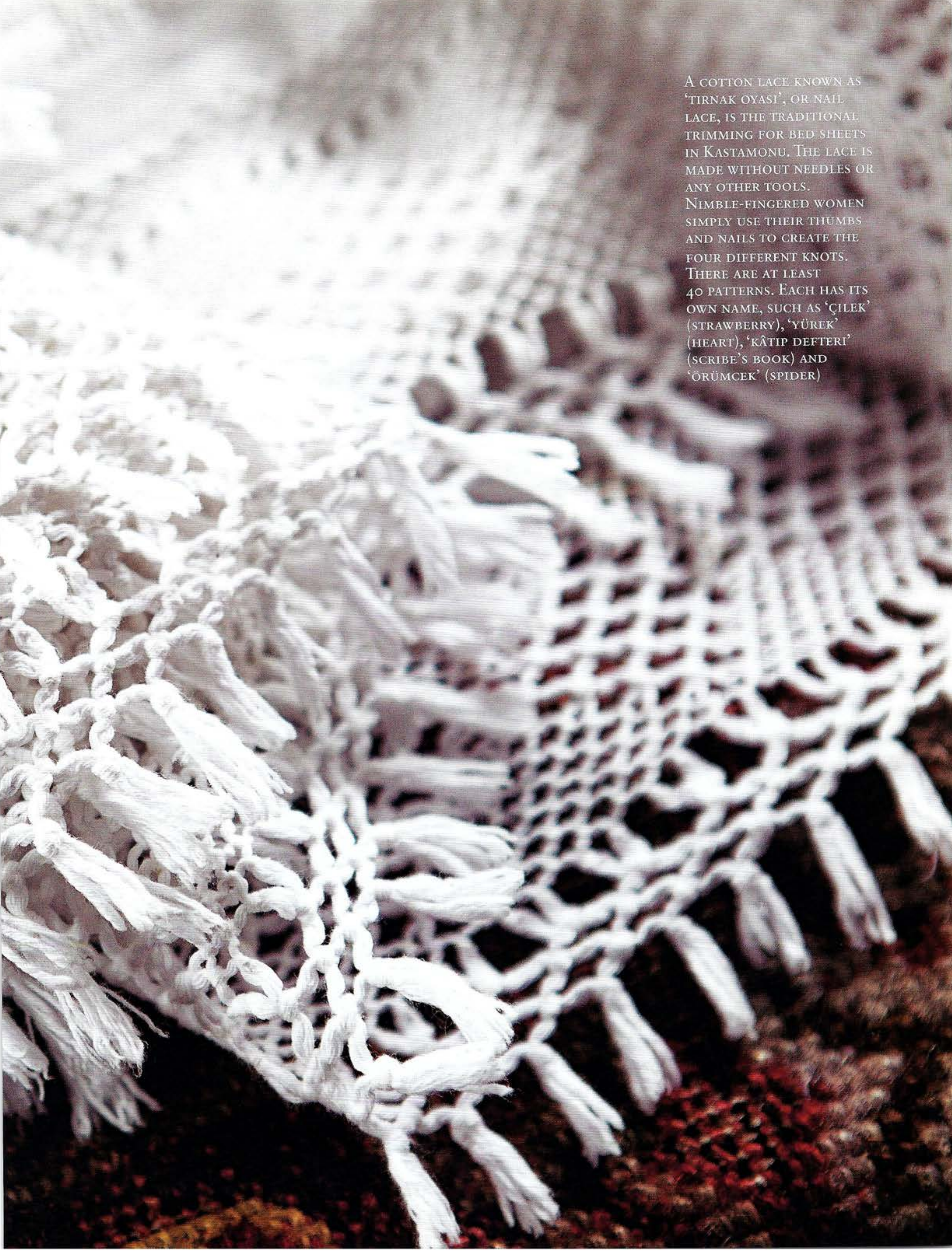
Ten miles from the city of Kastamonu, near the scattered village of Kavacık, the İzbeli Konak is an old-fashioned country house at the heart of an estate in the foothills of the Ilgaz Mountains. It is this range, rising to 2,587 metres, that traps the moist air floating up from the Black Sea and shields Kastamonu and its fertile farmlands from the arid central Anatolian plateau to the south. From the comfort of the divans lining the walls, you look out over a dishevelled orchard of plum and apple. Beyond, in the mist, is a sea of sweet chestnut, oak, beech and pine. Tea bubbles away on the wood-burning stove.

The İzbeli family, or İzbelizade, as they appear in Ottoman records, have been among the great and the good of Kastamonu since the 17th century, though family lore traces their roots to Bukhara in the Turkic heartlands of Central Asia, and they bear the



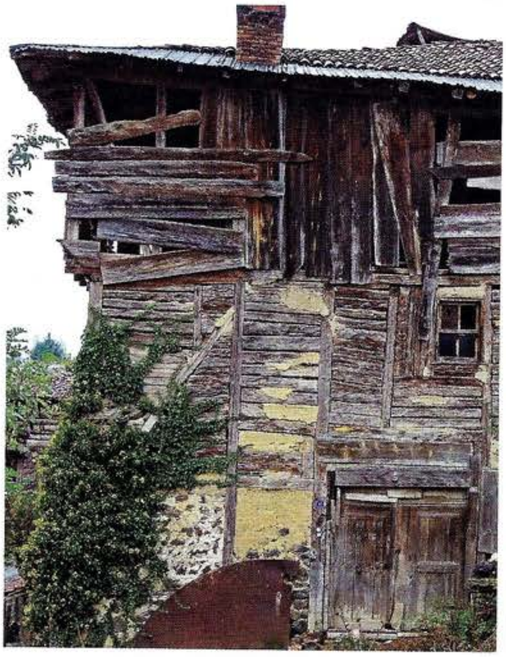
The iron bedstead and embroidered jacket in a guest bedroom are reminders of old Kastamonu. The white handwoven bedcovers are a Kastamonu tradition (see following pages)



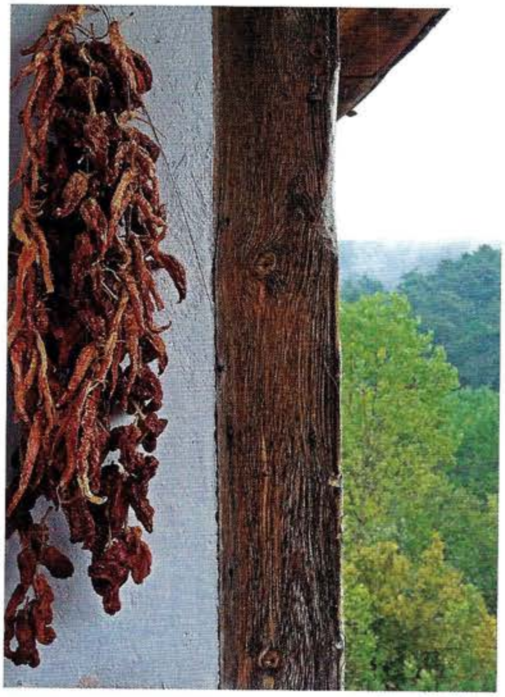


A cotton lace known as 'tirnak oyasi', or nail lace, is the traditional trimming for bed sheets in Kastamonu. The lace is made without needles or any other tools. Nimble-fingered women simply use their thumbs and nails to create the four different knots. There are at least 40 patterns. Each has its own name, such as 'çilek' (strawberry), 'yürek' (heart), 'kâtip defteri' (scribe's book) and 'örümcek' (spider)

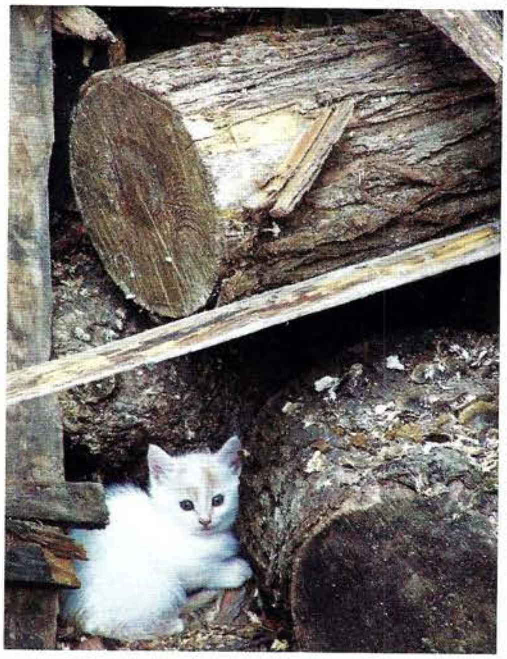
BELOW LEFT THE BARN FOR THE CATTLE AND WATER BUFFALOES – SOURCE OF MUCH CREAMY MILK AND CLOTTED CREAM – IS BUILT OF STONE AND LOGS INGENIOUSLY SECURED TO WITHSTAND EARTHQUAKES.



BOTTOM LEFT THE GRANARY'S SHABBY-LOOKING WALLS ARE JUST AN OUTER SHELL FOR SOLID INNER WALLS OF PRISTINE TIMBER PREDATING THE HOUSE ITSELF. UPSTAIRS THERE ARE RODENT-PROOF INNER SANCTUMS AS STURDY AS BANK VAULTS



BELOW RIGHT PAPRIKAS DRY ON THE BALCONY OF THE HOUSE. THE BREEZY INDIAN SUMMER BEFORE THE ONSET OF WINTER, KNOWN AS THE 'PASTIRMA YAZI', IS THE TIME TO PRESERVE PEPPERS, AUBERGINES, 'SUCUK' (SAUSAGE) AND THE 'PASTIRMA' (DRIED BEEF) FROM WHICH THE SEASON TAKES ITS NAME.



BOTTOM RIGHT LOGS FOR THE MANY STOVES PROVIDE REFUGE FOR A KITTEN

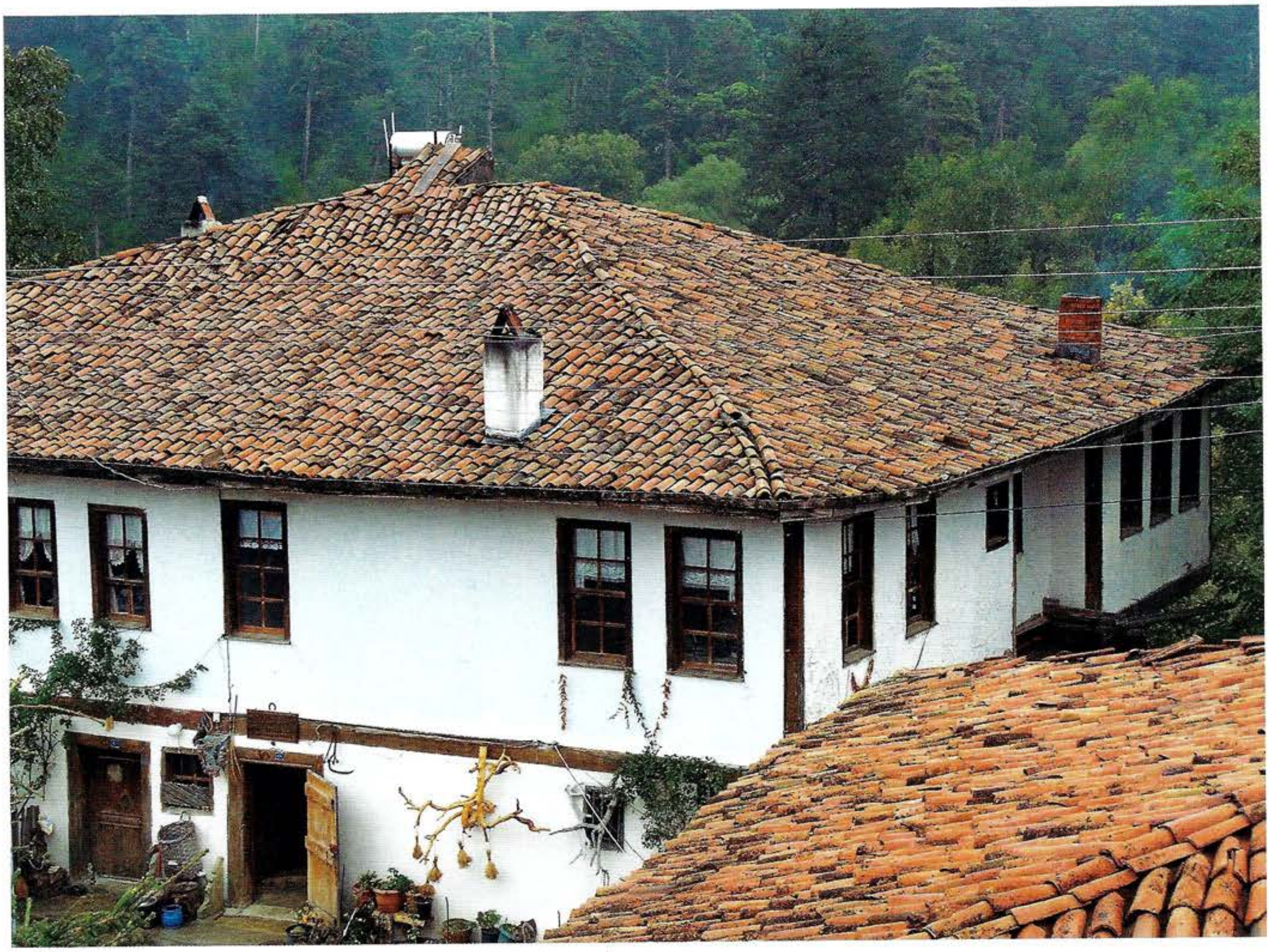
distinguished title of *seyyid*, descendants of the Prophet. They were granted this fertile countryside by Mehmet IV – "the Hunter", as he was known – in 1651. It was a *timar* estate: in lieu of tax the İzbeli were to raise *sipahi*, or cavalry, to send out each spring on the great Ottoman campaigns that would reach the walls of Vienna. As a mark of their good fortune, the İzbelizade endowed Kastamonu with a new mosque, a soup kitchen and a library. The 19th-century family town house still stands in the bazaar district.

Today the family has a matriarchal head, Sabiha İzbeli, who lives in the broad-roofed house at Kavacık, in a private apartment occupying one of the four corners of the first floor. Her mother, İzbelizade Hafız Selma Hanım (1864–1947), was a redoubtable leader in the Turkish struggle for independence after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War – the area around Kastamonu was the only region of the Black Sea unoccupied by foreign forces. A formidable bluestocking, Selma Hanım was a founding member of every solidarity society going, including Kızılay, the Red Crescent. She was also Kastamonu's first woman MP.

Her daughter Sabiha is another determined woman: a shelf is full of medals for achievements – in midwifery, charity work and more lately tourism. Alongside is a photograph of her looking every bit the Hollywood star. Now she does her bit for the economy, offering an all-day breakfast that has been voted one of the ten best in Turkey. This keeps the roof on the house, gives the house its purpose and provides Kavacık's women with useful employment doing one of the things they do best; no one leaves the table hungry.

And what a breakfast it is. Everything is produced on the the farm or grows wild round about. The morning starts with mugs of warm creamy milk from the three Jersey cows in the barn, followed by tea, a buttery omelette with fresh home-made bread baked with herbs gathered in the wild by the village women. The tables are laden with platters of local cheese, thick clotted cream from the farm's water buffaloes, and jams and preserves made from quince, rosehips, wild apples, the famed naked plum, *üryani erik*, even aubergines. Only olives are absent, but then this is not olive country – the cooking oil of choice is hazelnut.

There is nothing precious about the house. Every nook and cranny not occupied by a



breakfast table is crammed with mementos. For a year or so, breakfasters signed their names on a "visitors' wall" rather than in a book, but that got out of hand. Through these breakfasts in this lovely workaday Ottoman konak, Sabiha Hanım has given people a glimpse of what civilised life on an Anatolian estate was all about.

Sabiha Hanım and her two sons have been farming the estate organically since the 1990s. Serdar, the eldest, an agriculturalist with a keen interest in ecology, has established a seed bank for local fruit and vegetables and also works for the state as a deputy in Kastamonu's commodity exchange. The second son gave up a well-paid career as an economist to indulge his passion for woodwork. He is lovingly maintaining the house's fabric without modernising it – it still has its old wooden gutters and traditional roof tiles. He also creates sculptures from ancient branches picked up on long walks though the forests of the Ilgaz Mountains.

Visitors drop in on the İzbeli Konak in numbers that would faze anyone not brought up in the old Turkish country-house ways. As we were photographing, 40 hungry visitors from Trabzon arrived at an hour's notice en route to nearby Safranbolu, which rivals Kastamonu in its wealth of historic houses but is better known. A flurry of flour and eggs around the kitchen's open fire soon produced 40 freshly griddled *gözleme* pancakes oozing with cheese and wild herbs.

The house is simply decorated but very comfortable and welcoming, with kilims on the floor and divans along the whitewashed walls. Wood-burning stoves have replaced the fireplaces that you see in older konaks. Thanks to the İzbeli family, we have the opportunity not only to taste delicious food but also to experience real country life.

İzbeli Çiftliği, Kavacık Köy, Kastamonu. The konak is a private home and visits should be arranged in advance. +90 366 244 3645; +90 532 575 7752

TOP AGEING GRACEFULLY, THE SWEEPING HIPPED ROOF OF THE İZBELI KONAK. THE WALLS ARE OF WHITEWASHED LATH AND PLASTER WITH EXPOSED TIMBER FRAMES. SEPARATE FRONT DOORS LEAD TO THE GROUND AND FIRST FLOORS.
ABOVE A GAGGLE OF GEESE PATROLLING A FARMYARD FULL OF CATS, DOGS, TURKEYS AND HENS

KASTAMONU

A TOWN OF MANY MANSIONS

The old Silk Road city of Kastamonu is a place of unflashy charms that wears its heritage lightly. The bell of the clock tower still sounds the time in the old bazaars, in the city square with its early-20th-century palazzos, in the unkempt parks with their ancient rock-cut tombs, and around the hills, where hundreds of handsome Ottoman mansions can be glimpsed amid the creeping concrete. It rivals nearby Safranbolu, a World Heritage Site, in its wealth of historic houses, but most – like the Balaban Konak featured on page 94 – are gently crumbling, untroubled by officialdom

6 Kastamonu Manzarasi (Gayret Kütüphanesi)

MURAT KARASALIHOĞLU

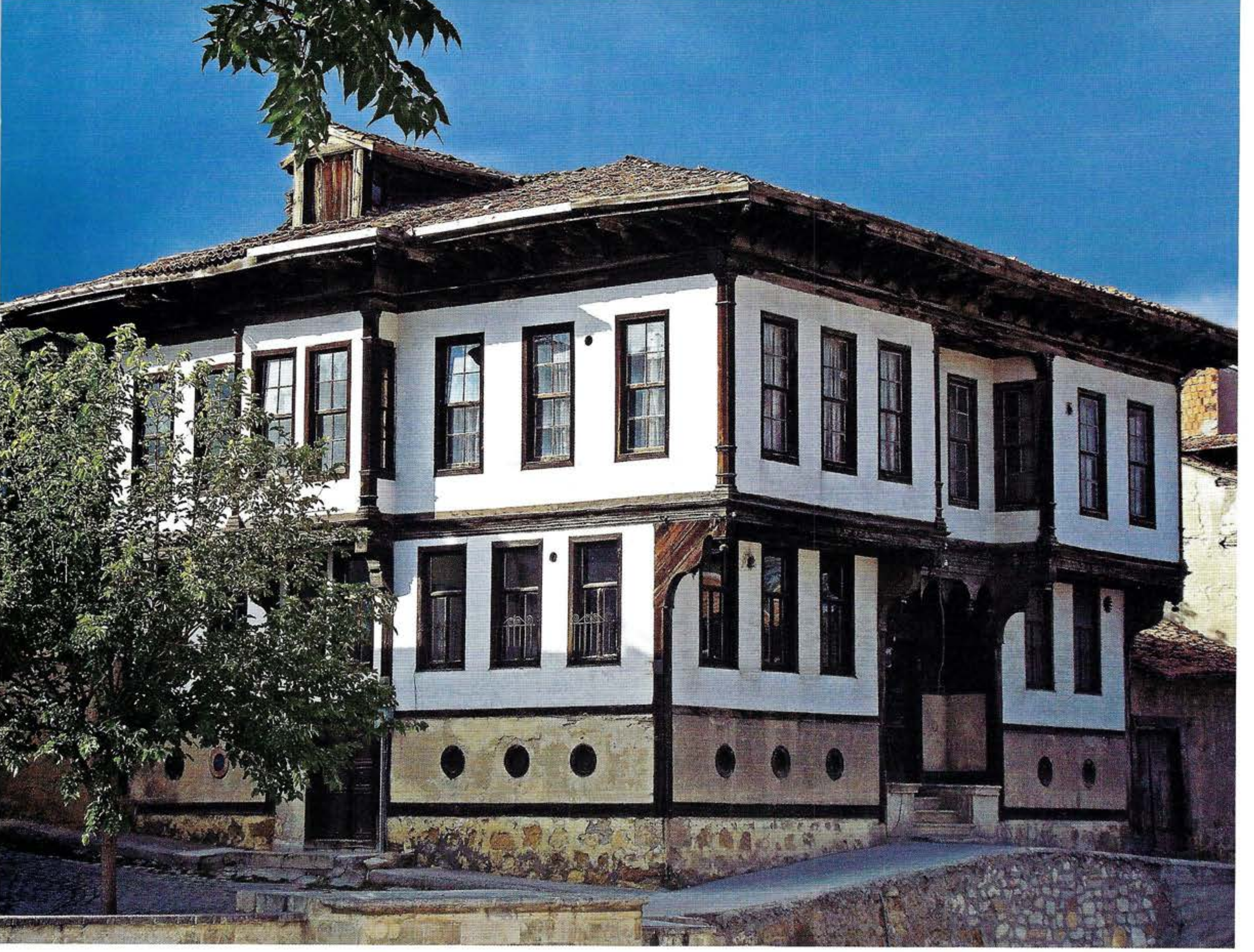
Kastamonu is a place of history, mystery and mountains near the centre of Turkey's Black Sea coast. In ancient times it was the home of the Paphlagonians, whose tombs can still be seen in chambers carved into rocky outcrops in the town. The origins of the name Kastamonu – shared by the city and the province – are still debated today. Some say it derives from Castra Komnenon, the castle built above the city by the Komneni, landowners who became Byzantine emperors in the 11th century and established the breakaway empire of Trebizond. Others say it comes from the plant genus *Castanea*, because sweet chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*)

have been harvested locally since Roman times, along with that bitter elixir, chestnut honey. Virgin chestnut forests still exist here.

Kastamonu's Turkish history began in the 11th century, when the Seljuks of Rum held sway over most of Anatolia. The earliest monuments, such as the gate to the great hospital built in 1272, date from the 13th century, when Turcoman officers assumed power, ruling as beys or emirs. Mehmet the Conqueror annexed the mineral-rich province in 1461, to secure the Silk Road to Tabriz and Black Sea trade routes.

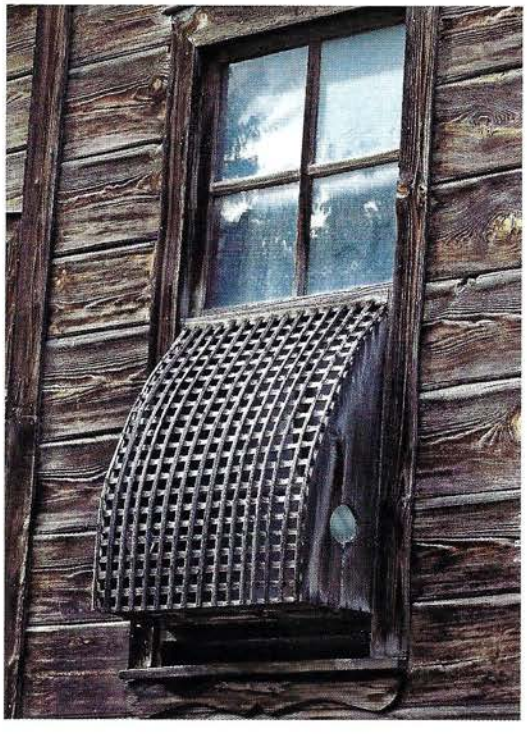
For centuries both the countryside and urban Kastamonu were full of great konaks, or mansions; many have since been swept away, including the beautiful houses that once lined the embankments of the Karaçomak River in the town, but hundreds survive to tell their own stories. As Turkey entered the modern age, they were joined by a new generation of public buildings, such as the famous clock tower, whose bell has rung out every hour for 125 years.

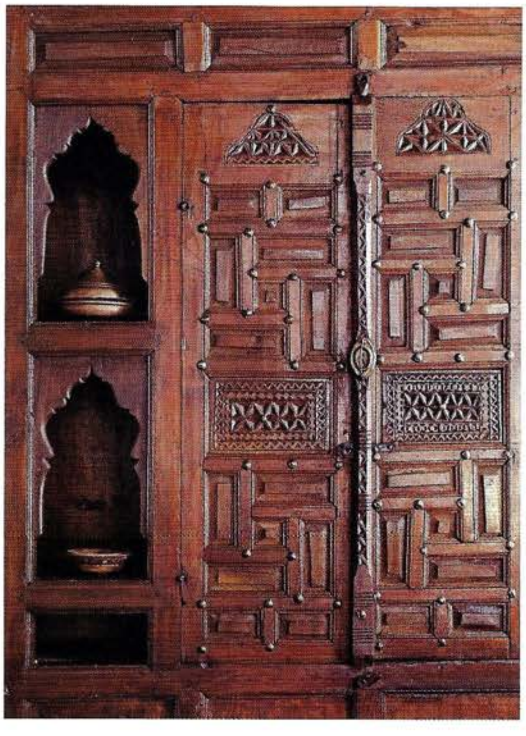
ABOVE THE BELL IN THE 1885 CLOCK TOWER RINGS OUT OVER THE HILLS OF KASTAMONU. OPPOSITE CHANGING TIMES: A NEW SQUARE LINED WITH PUBLIC BUILDINGS APPEARED AMONG THE KONAKS A CENTURY AGO. IT WAS HERE THAT MUSTAFA KEMAL PASHA (WHO BECAME ATATÜRK) ANNOUNCED THE BANNING OF THE FEZ IN 1925

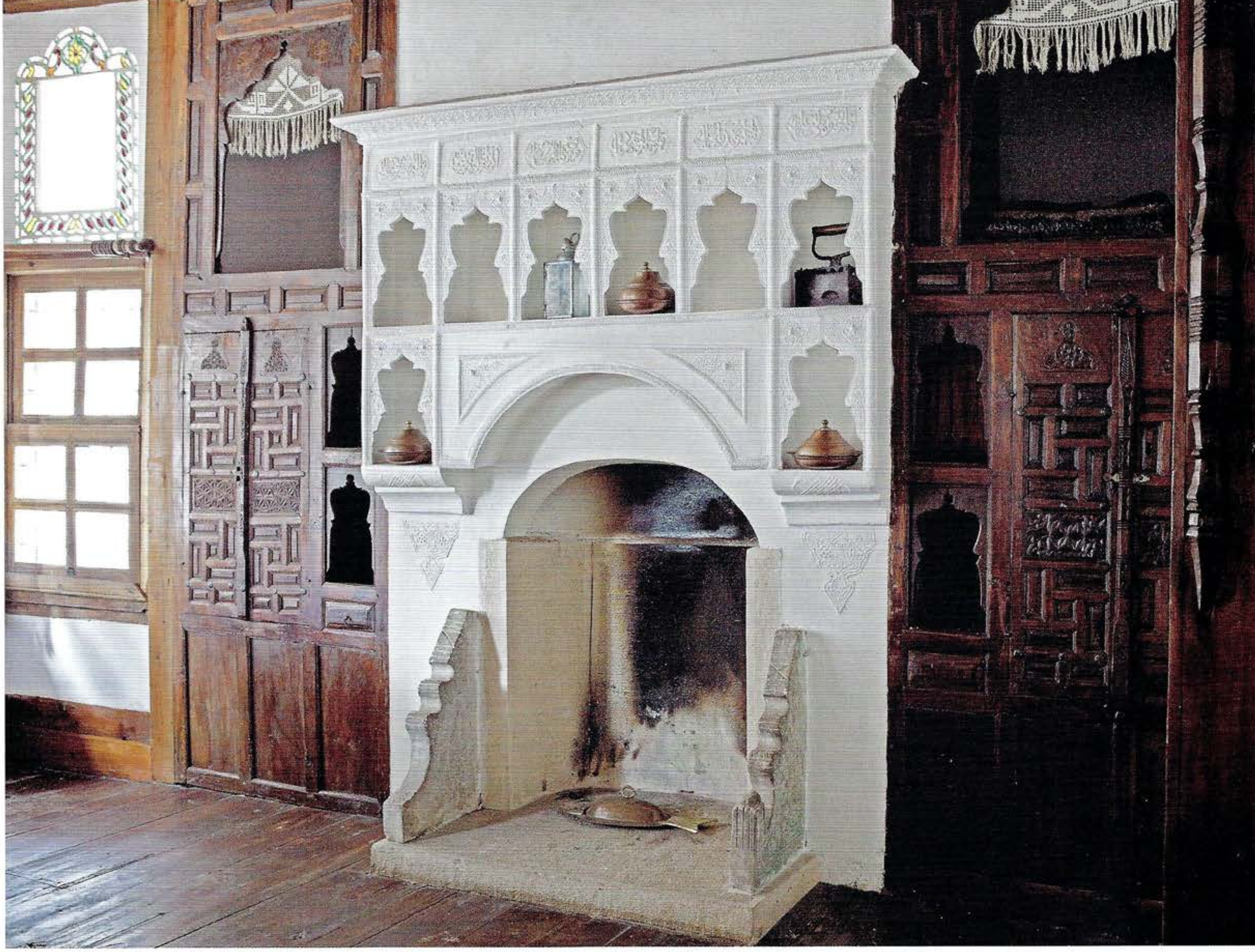


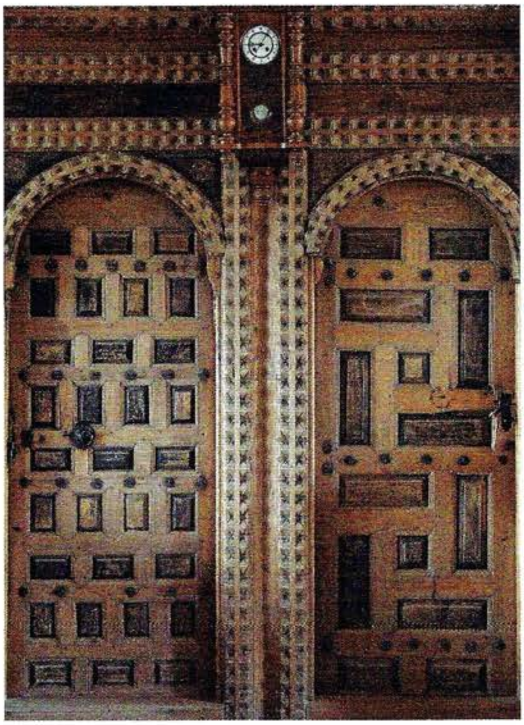
How Kastamonu liked to live

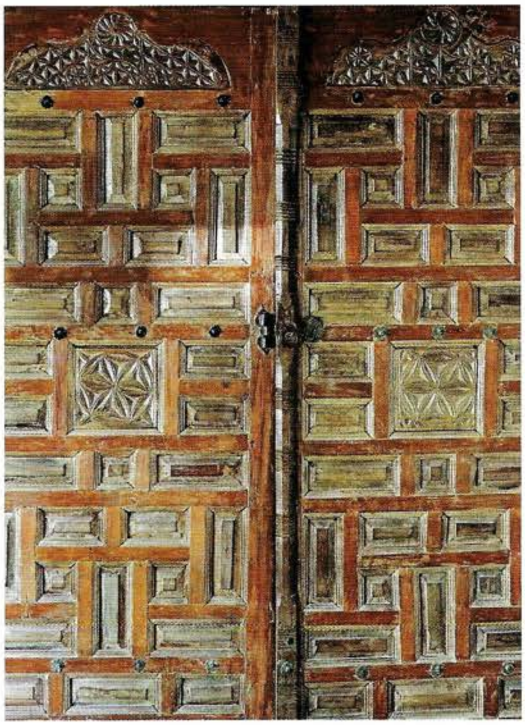
Some 350 historic houses crowd the hills of Kastamonu. Grandees also owned nearby country estates with mansions, so the province has a total of more than 1,000 listed houses – a formidable heritage. Light and comfort were prime concerns in the design, and views mattered too: no new house was permitted to obstruct another's prospect. Every konak has a different façade, which makes the town a rewarding place to explore, but the floor plan is always much the same. The classic konak has a stone basement for storage and animals, and two timber-framed upper floors with four main rooms per floor, one in each corner. The exterior has overhanging bays and sash windows and is plain except for doors with ornate ironwork locks and fittings.



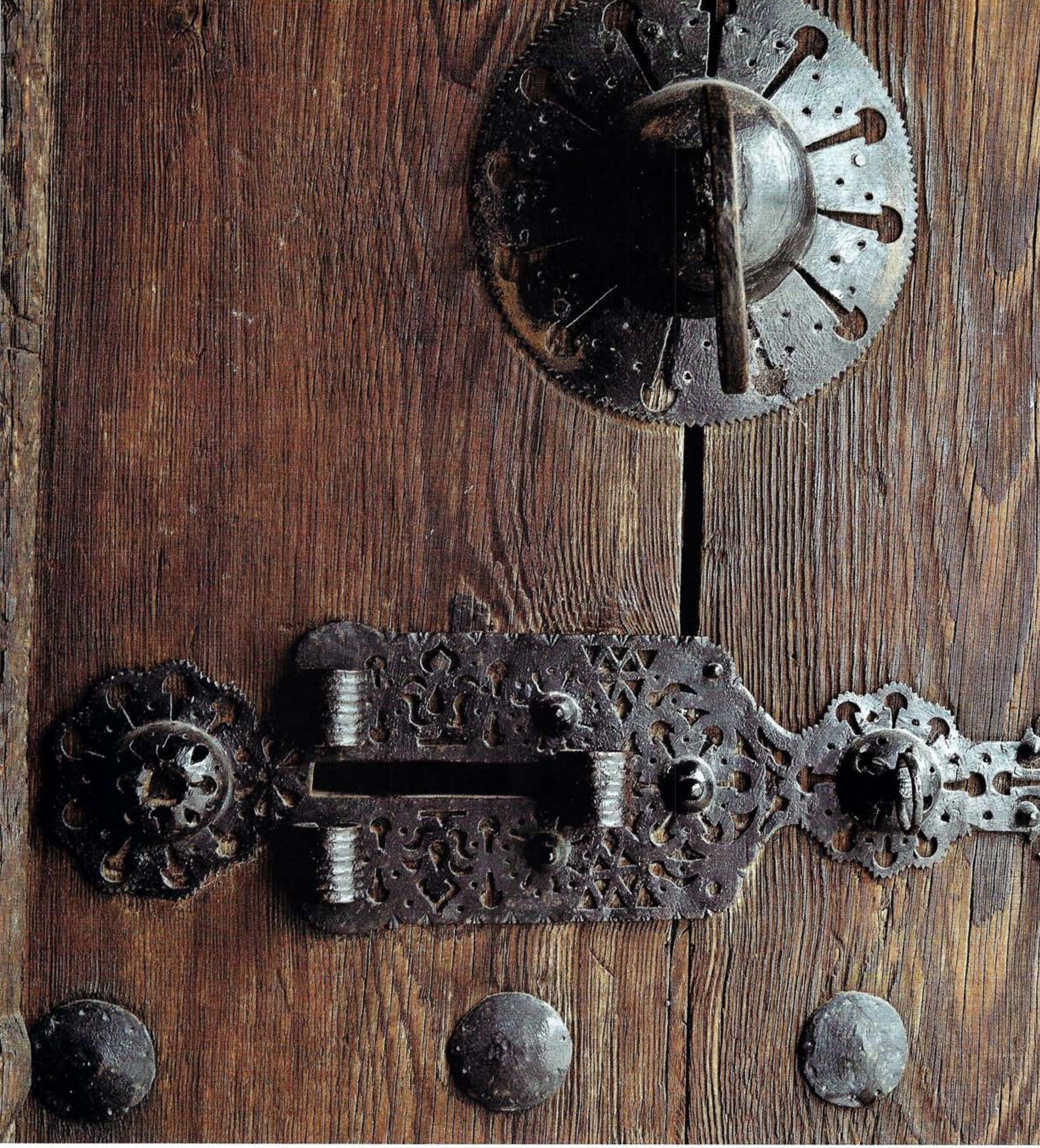








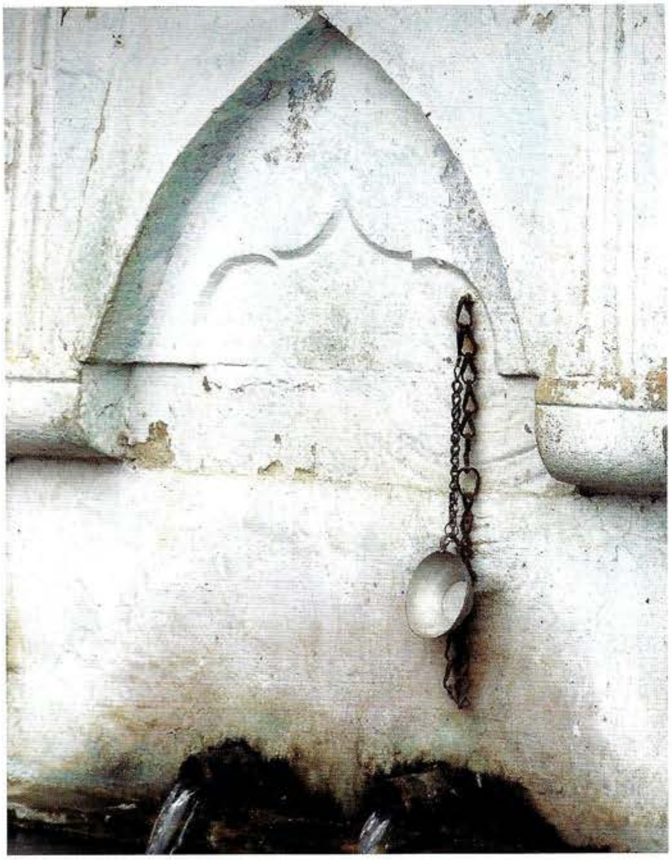
Opposite, top A classic Ottoman konak in Kastamonu. **Above** The fireplace in the 'başoda', or main reception room, of a newly restored konak, with stucco niches ranged above and built-in wooden cupboards on either side. The upper row of stained-glass 'head windows' ('tepe pencere') – an 18th-century feature – adds a dash of colour. **Bottom row** Skilled carpentry is seen everywhere in Kastamonu. From far left: a latticework window; a niched cupboard (also above); handsome double-arched doors in a 'sofa', or central hall, in Daday; and cupboard doors from another Kastamonu konak – a refined combination of rectangles and floral patterns in different woods

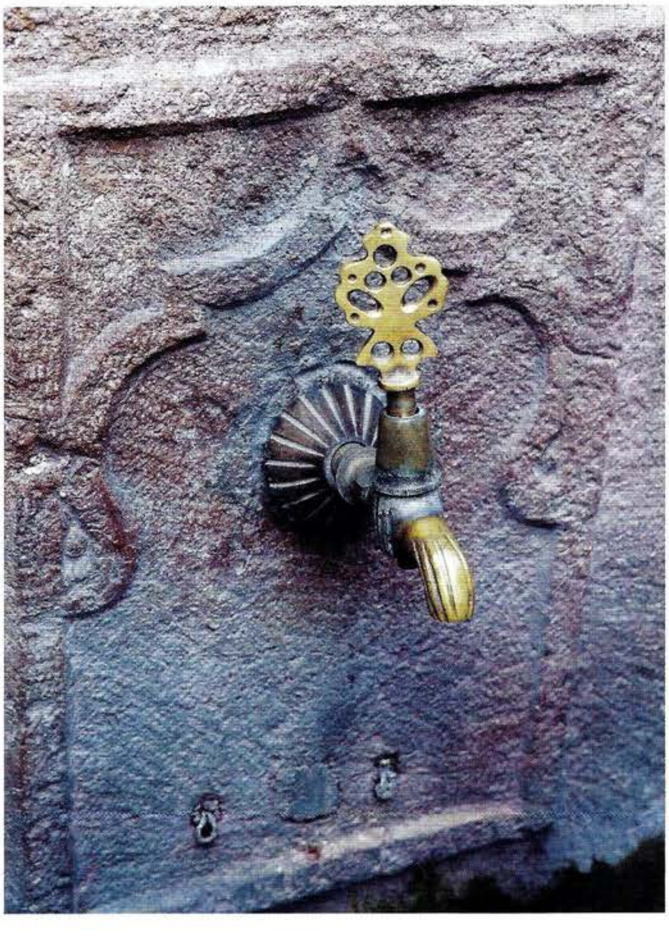


PATRONS OF BEAUTY AND PRACTICALITY

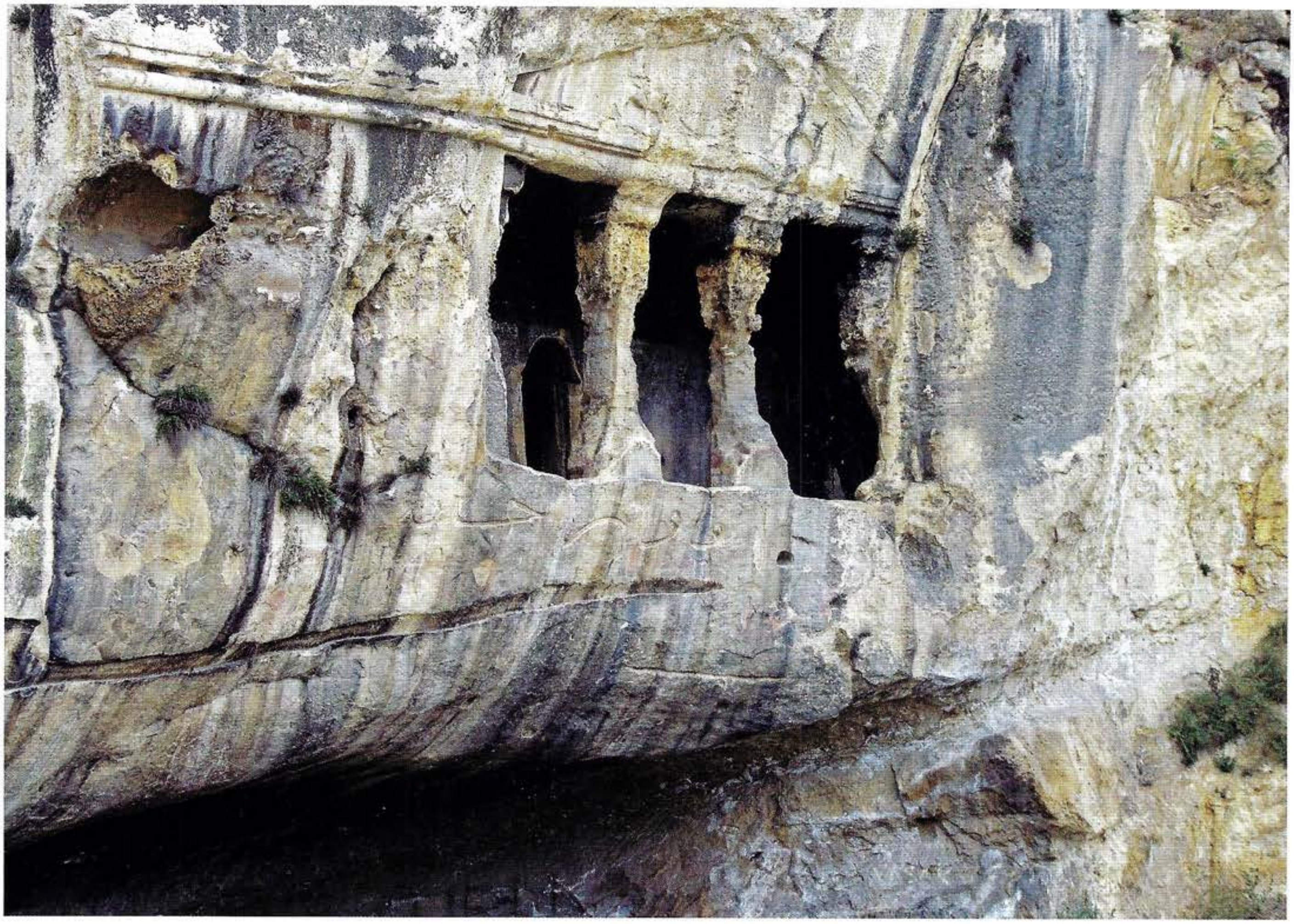
Decoration in Kastamonu houses was mainly indoors. One way owners displayed their taste and discernment outside was with elaborate locks. Double-leafed front doors and courtyard gates had wrought-iron lock fittings beaten to handsome designs. The heavy planks were further reinforced with sturdy large-headed iron nails.

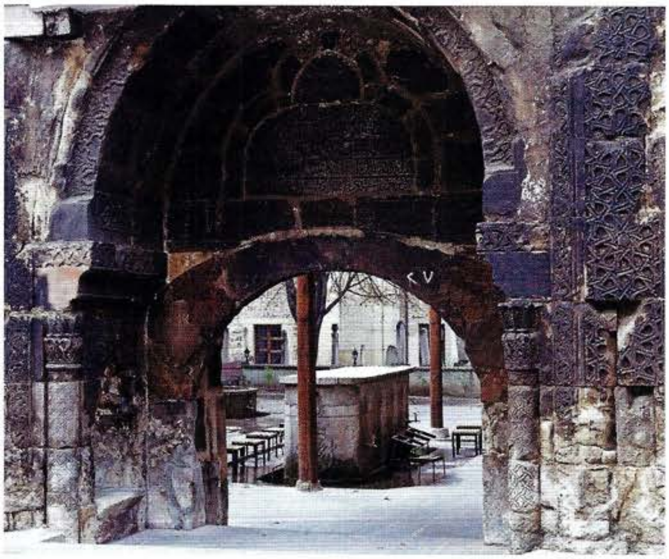
Philanthropy found tasteful expression in fountains on practically every street. Houses may have had cisterns or wells, but in 1890 drinking water was also being piped to no fewer than 128 fountains, one for every seven households. Unlike those in Istanbul, the fountains here are still in working order.

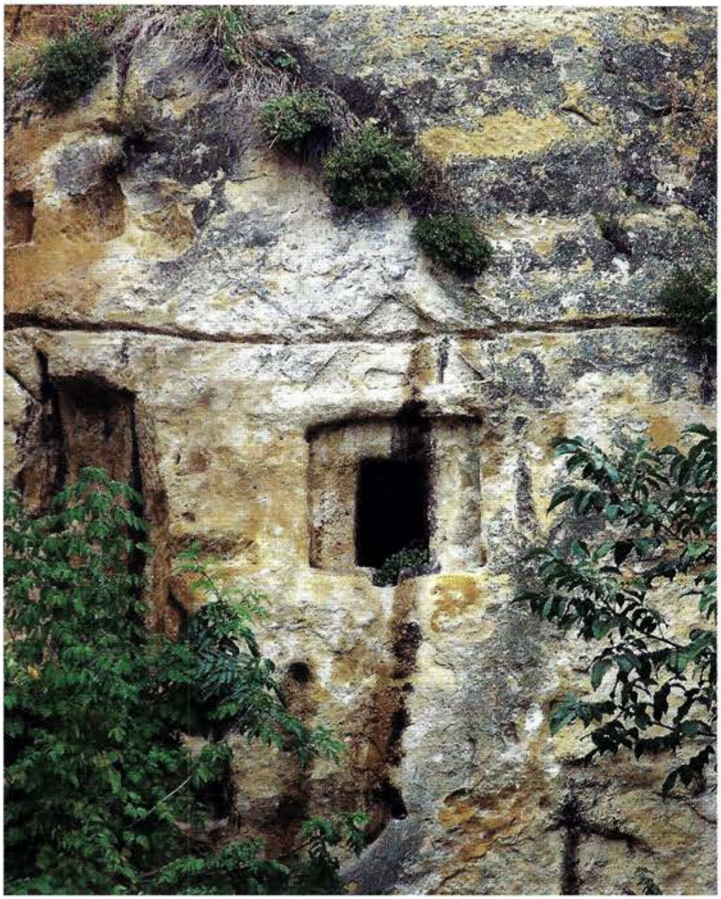




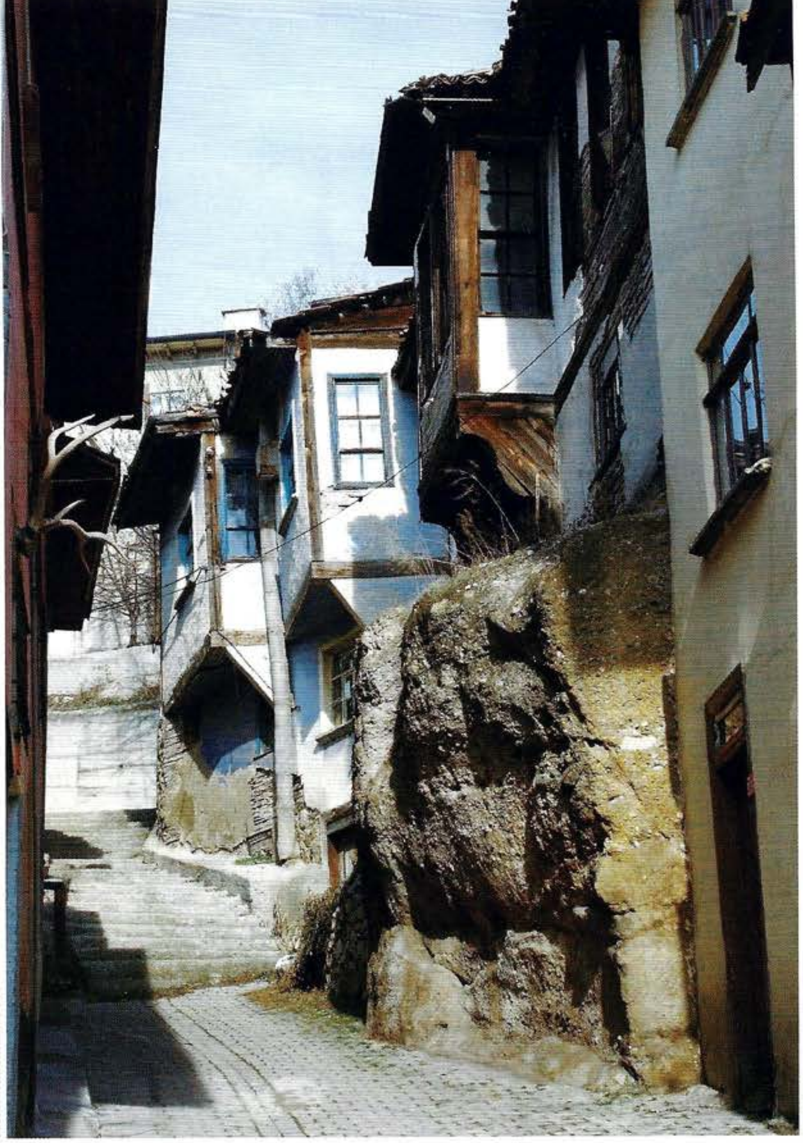
Above An oak front door with an elaborate floral and geometric iron lock. Right Two of Kastamonu's many fountains, one for running spring water, the other with its original tap







Top This triple-chambered Paphlagonian tomb, the Evkaya, was carved out in the 4th century BC. **Above** The portal of the Darü'ş Şifa (Hospital), built in 1272 in the centre of town by Kastamonu's first Turkish rulers, the Çobanoğulları. The portal still shows the scars of the 1837 fire that destroyed the hospital. **Right** A Paphlagonian tomb from the 2nd century BC

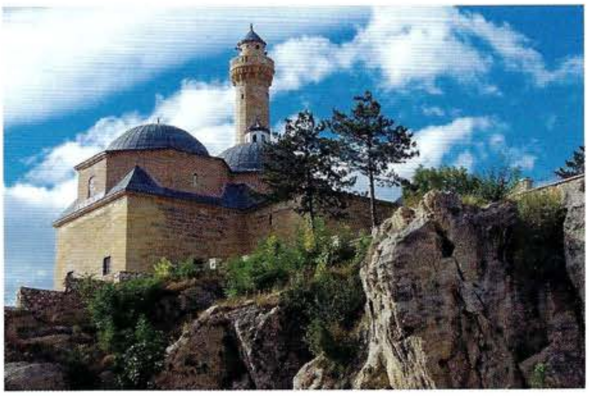


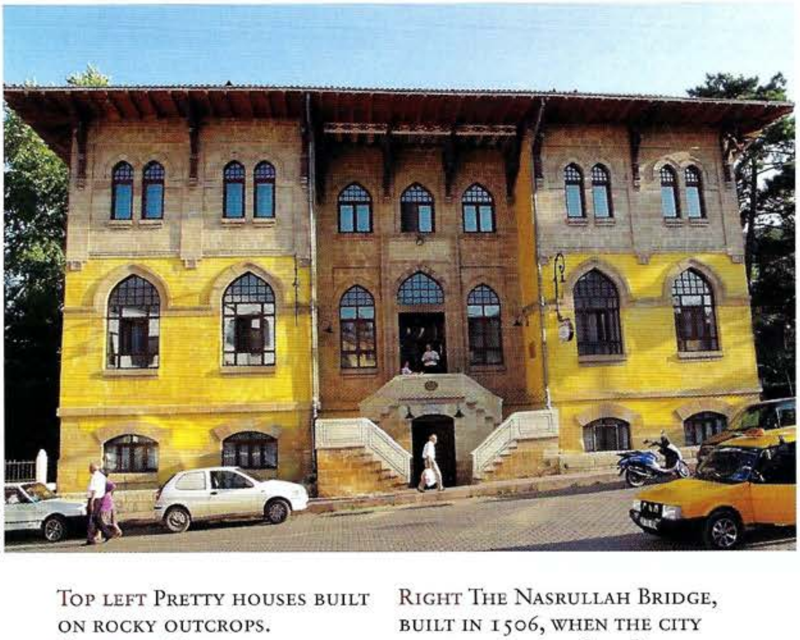
MURAT KARASALIHOĞLU

KASTAMONU ON THE ROCKS

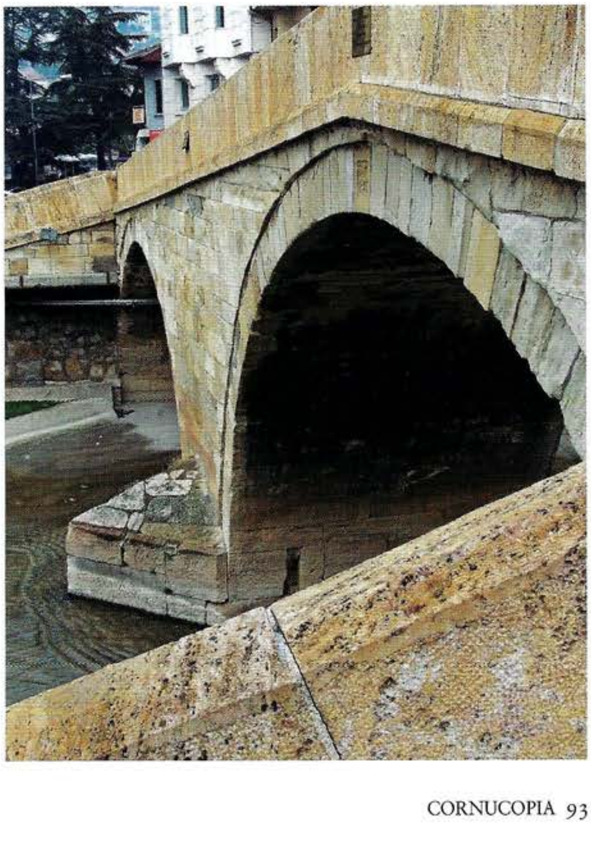
Kastamonu is more than a collection of fine mansions. Ancient Paphlagonian tombs are carved into the cliffs, some dating back as far as the fourth century BC. In narrow lanes dozens of modest 19th-century houses climb rocky outcrops to gain a view from their pretty bay windows. And crowning one hill is the double-domed mosque of İsmail Bey, who also built a fine caravanserai in the heart of the bazaars – the Kurşunlu Han, now a hotel. İsmail Bey, whose dynasty, the Candarlı, had ruled Kastamonu since 1291, was exiled when the Ottoman sultan Mehmet the Conqueror annexed the region in 1461.

It is true that concrete runs riot down by the river and over many hills. And one or more of the arches of the invincible Nasrullah Bridge, constructed in 1506, has been lopped off to make way for a boulevard. But even here there are delights to be found: from the intricately carved gate of the 13th-century hospital to a dozen elegantly proportioned National Revival palazzos from the early 1900s.





JOHN SCOTT

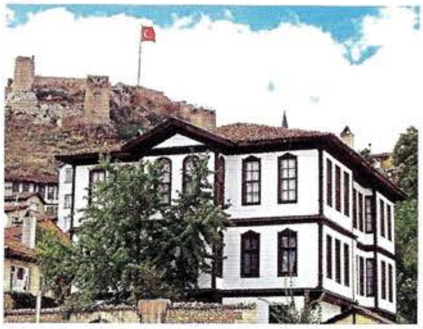


Top left Pretty houses built on rocky outcrops.
Top right The mosque built by the last Candarli emir, İsmail Bey. His reign, from 1443 to 1461, marked the last golden age of independence.

Right The Nasrullah Bridge, built in 1506, when the city was a key to the Silk Road.
Above The old municipality building, begun in 1897 in a Revivalist style, is now the Ottoman Palace Hotel

WINDING DOWN

The Balabans proudly trace their history back to the 13th century. In their town house in the centre of Kastamonu, time seems to be standing still



The last of the Balabans still lead a double life: one day country gentry, the next well-to-do burghers, their year neatly divided between town and country, with a handsome konak full of childhood memories in each.

Summers are spent in a rambling country house 25 minutes from Kastamonu, in Meran, a village of quite colossal konaks close to the town of Daday. There the Balaban house was so large that it never really needed to be completed: the top floor, finished on the outside, is a mere skeleton inside. In winter they move back to their konak in the commercial heart of Kastamonu, seen here. They are close to the bazaars, baths and mosques, surrounded by narrow alleyways and watched over by Kastamonu's fortress.

A dozen or so of Kastamonu's mansions have been adapted to modern use. The Toprakçılar and Uğurlu Konaks are now hotels. The Eflanili Konak is a restaurant. The largest of them all, built in 1870 by Mir Liva Pasha – an Ottoman hero who fought with Gazi Osman Pasha at the siege of Plevne and was captured by the Russians – is now the Ethnographic Museum. But the konak owned by Murat Oğuz Balaban and his sister is special. Not only is it one of the best-preserved in the city: it is almost the only one still lived in by the family it was built for in the 19th century.

The Balabans now share the konak with relatives. The way the house was laid out, divided in the traditional way between reception quarters for men (*selamlık*) and private quarters for close family and women (*harem*), allows them to do so without any loss of privacy or danger of inadvertently bumping into a cousin. All four sides of the house have "front" doors. The building has two sets of stairs, and the main reception room – the sofa – is divided down the middle by double doors (which have only to be flung open for the house to become whole again).

Opposite: Niches for vases and other precious objects, known as 'terec', can be of stucco or wood and very fanciful.
This page: Pumpkins on the landing of the Balabans' town konak ready to be made into 'kabak tatlisi', a popular winter's evening pudding, served with generous helpings of walnuts

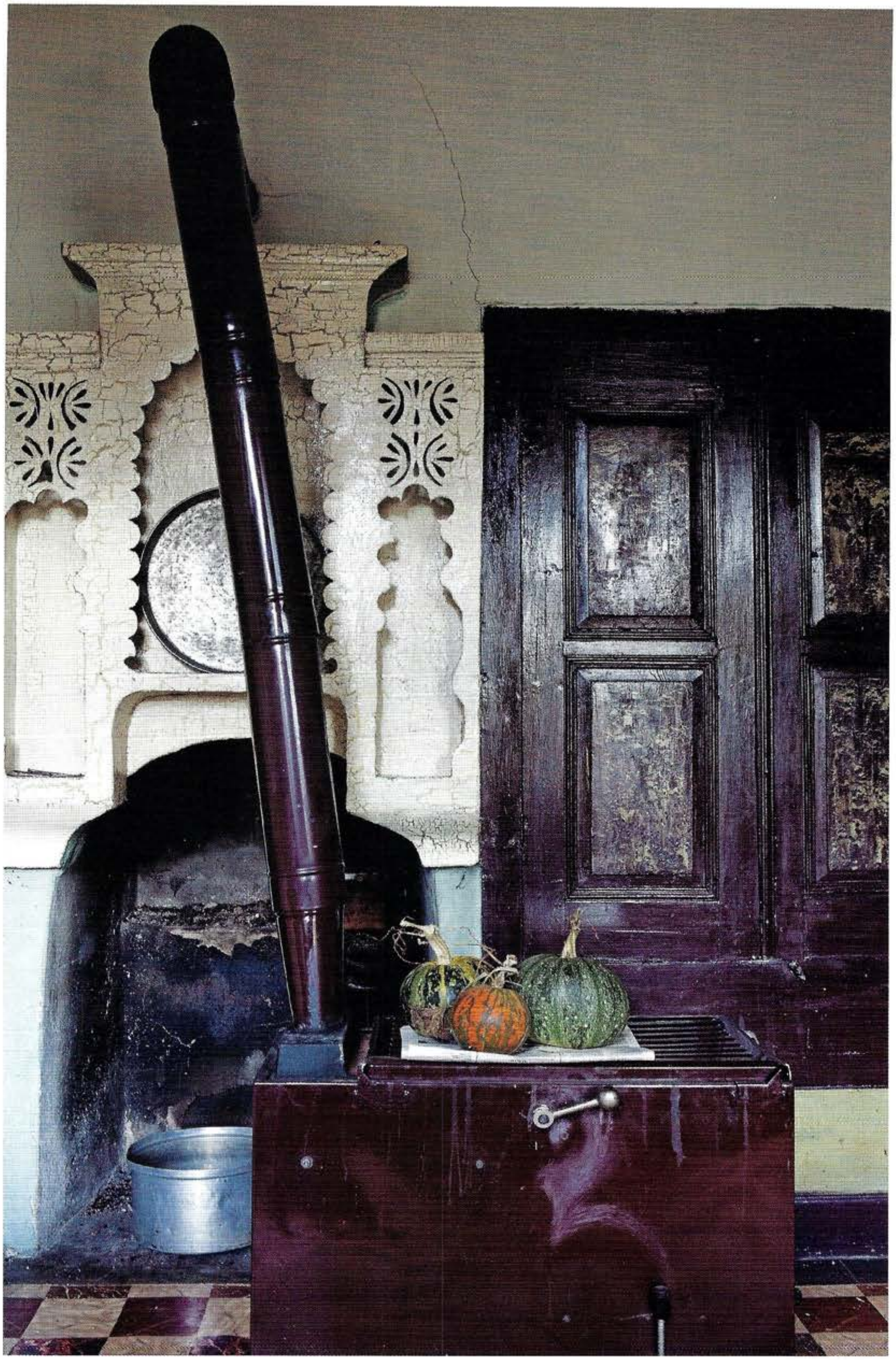
When we visited, it was autumn. Although pumpkins brought in from the country were drying on the stairs of the town house, ready to be made into that most restorative of wintry desserts, *kabak tatlısı* (pumpkin pudding), the Balabans were back in Meran for the walnut harvest. So we brought them into town, returning them in the evening with a boot full of gas bottles, anchovies and other essentials. There, a frail old couple came out of a cottage by the gate to help carry things in, and we were led upstairs through empty, achingly cold stables which would once have been full of animals and warmed the whole house. It was sad leaving them alone in that melancholy mansion in the pouring rain.

Earlier in the day, Murat Bey had leant back in his gilded rocking chair and embarked on the epic of the Balabans, century by century, starting in the 13th, when the Candarlı emirs had awarded them Meran and land all around for their services.

He ended with the story of the map, the gunpowder flask and the single boot hanging on the wall: precious mementos of their great-uncle Hasan Tahsin's best friend, who had fallen in the First World War. They were given to him by the friend's mother, who would live under the Balabans' generous roof for the rest of her days.

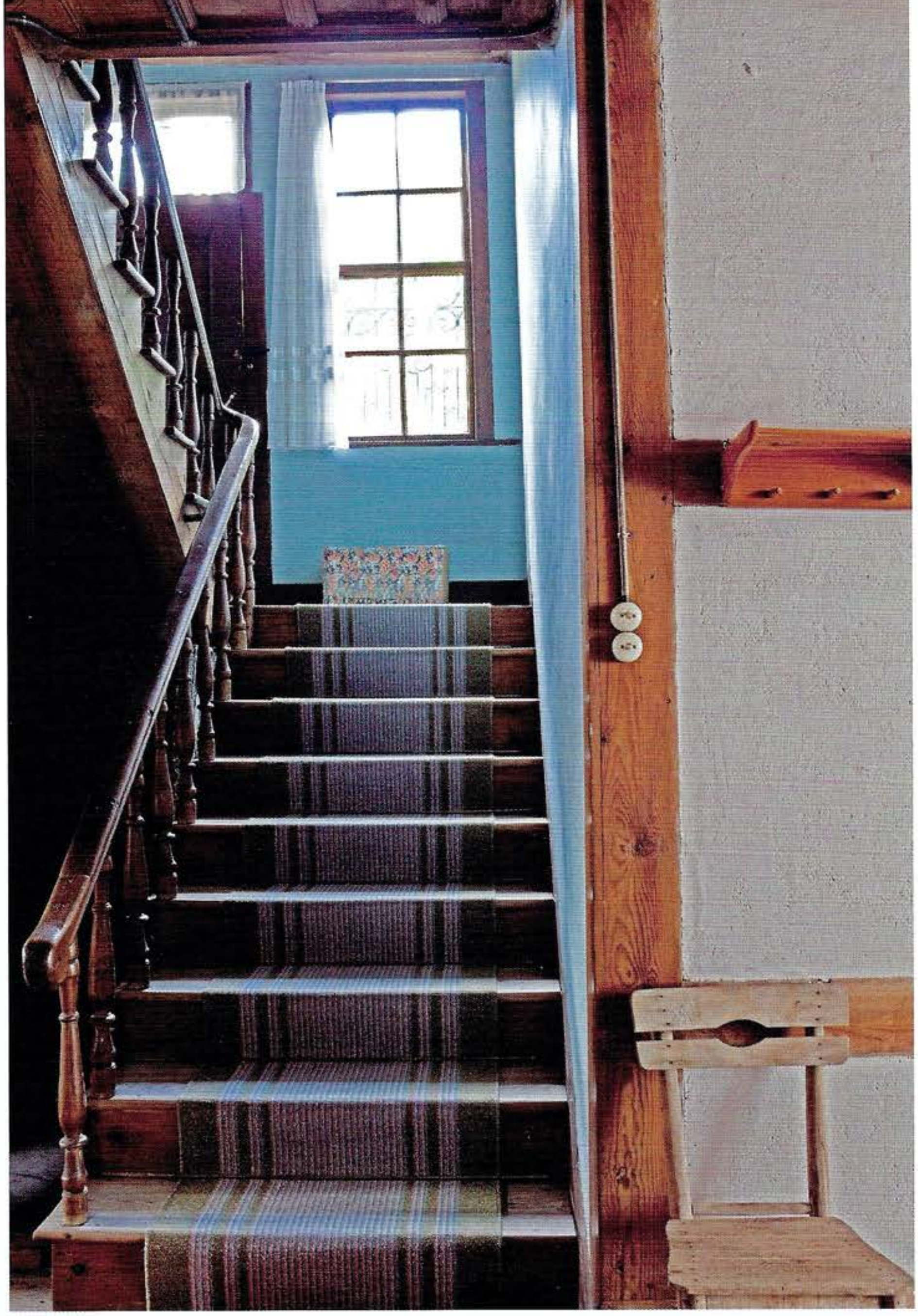
Times are hard now for Kastamonu's old families. The İzbelis in Kavacık are a rare success story, but most konaks are falling to rack and ruin. And because the grand houses were once the nucleus of all country life, whole villages are melting away with them.

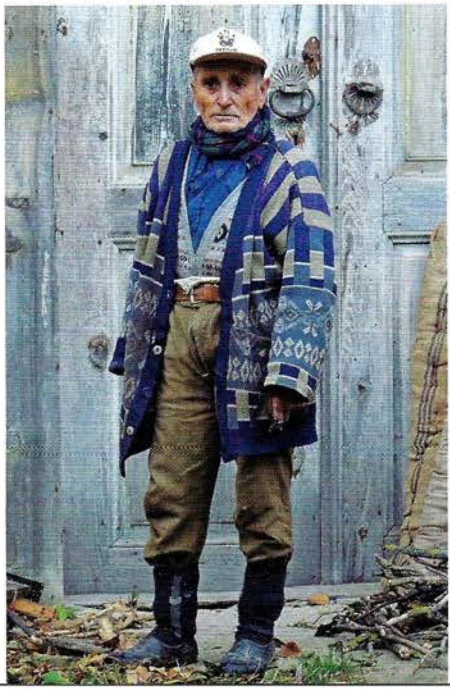
Meanwhile, Murat Oğuz Balaban dreams on. Having laid the Balabans' history to rest, he explains how he and his sister long to share their houses with like-minded contemporaries, turning them into havens where they can pass their last years in tranquillity. There's plenty of room. And yes, at the country house he would like to revive the gardens, with their plum trees and huge box trees – and a swimming pool and a tennis court would be very pleasant.



ABOVE THE KITCHEN IN THE BALABAN TOWN KONAK USED TO BE ONE OF THE CORNER LIVING ROOMS. LINEN WOULD HAVE BEEN WELL AIRED IN THE CUPBOARD BY THE FIREPLACE.

OPPOSITE MURAT BALABAN (CENTRE LEFT) LIVES IN BOTH TOWN AND COUNTRY ANCESTRAL HOMES WITH HIS SISTER. HIS GREAT-UNCLE HASAN TAHSIN (TOP LEFT) WAS AN OTTOMAN OFFICER IN YEMEN (BOTTOM RIGHT). A RETAINER STILL LIVES IN THE GATEHOUSE OF THE COUNTRY KONAK (BOTTOM LEFT). ONE OF THE STAIRCASES IN THE TOWN KONAK





THE GREEN ROAD TO THE BLACK SEA

This hazelnut grove is on the road to İnebolu, on the Black Sea coast 60 miles north of Kastamonu. The lush green hills here are rich in minerals: copper has been mined at Küre, a few miles to the south, since 3000 BC. They are also the source of the pigment that creates *aşıboya*, the famous oxblood paint used to protect İnebolu's distinctive timber houses from woodworm and rot. The gardener's hut in this picture has been painted with *aşıboya*. So, too, are many of the fashionable yalıs on the Bosphorus.

The earth pigment rich in metal oxide is extracted in the nearby village of Aşı Köy. Lumps of pigment are crushed to a powder and mixed with juniper tar and linseed oil from Kastamonu, whose wealth used to be based on flax.

Whichever way you drive from Kastamonu, the road to İnebolu is seriously steep. Your car is likely to smell of burning rubber going down and burning engine oil going back up. Pack animals would take three days to make the journey. It is now possible to do it on foot along the waymarked Independence Trail.

A HAZELNUT GROVE BELOW THE ÇUHADAROĞLU PASS. THE GARDENER'S HUT IS PAINTED A TRADITIONAL 'AŞIBOYA' RED

KASTAMONU

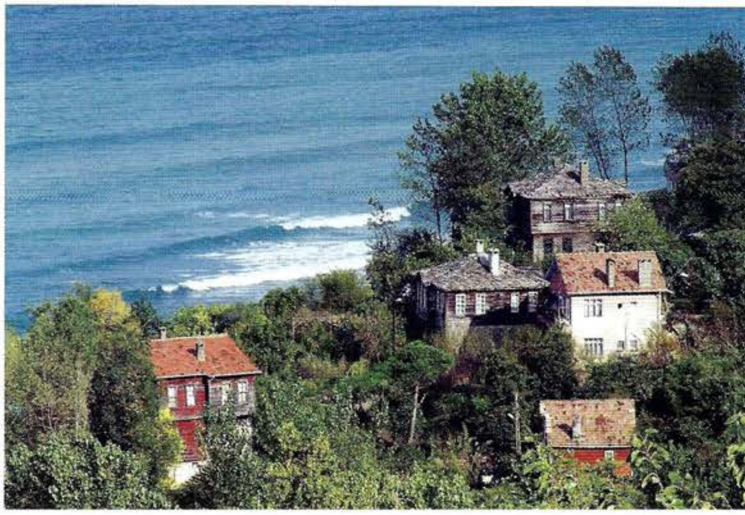
THE QUIET COAST

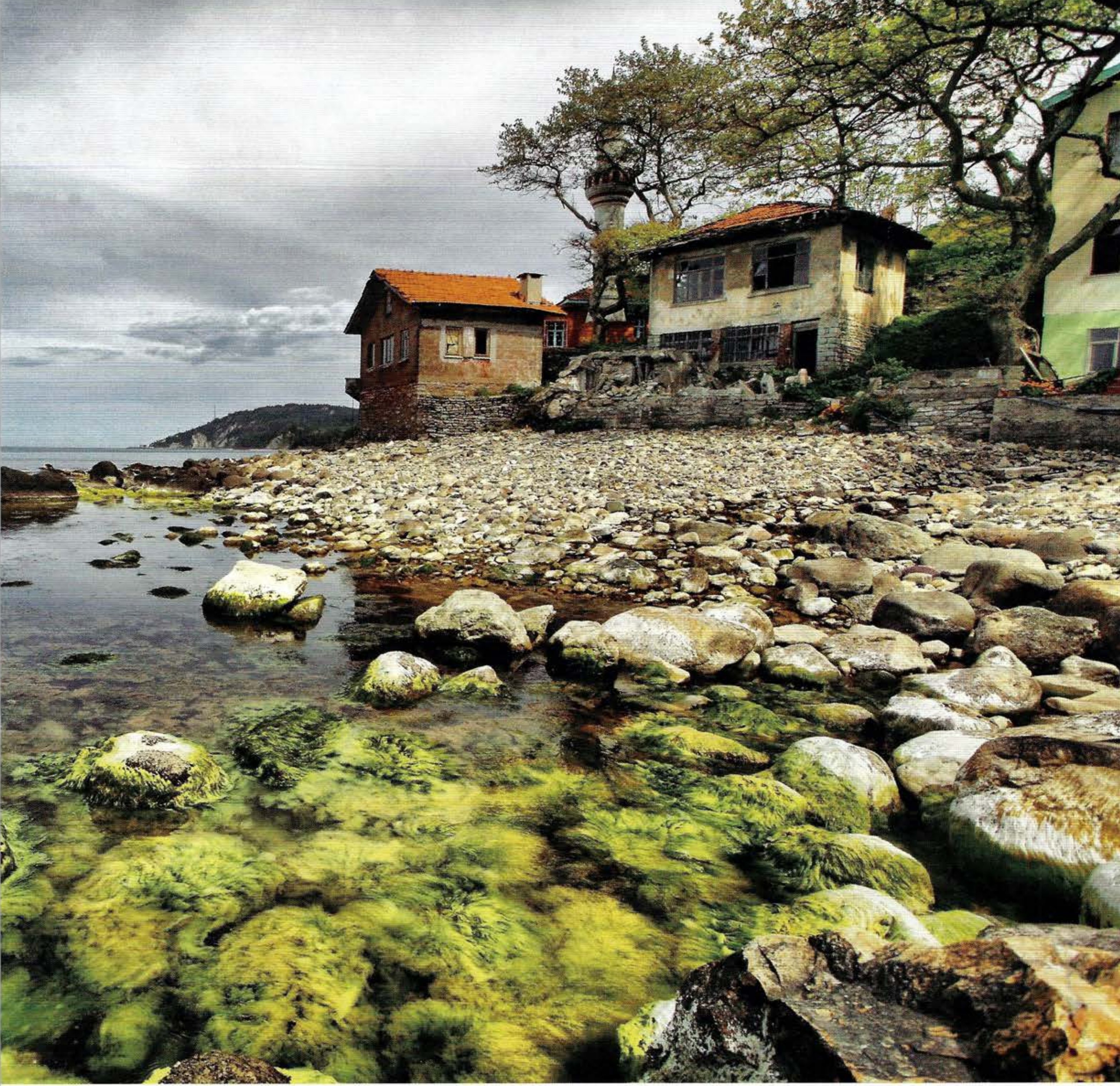
The town of İnebolu has long been Kastamonu's lifeline, giving it vital access to the Black Sea. Ships once sailed from here laden with flax and copper. Today it is a sleepy market town at the centre of a coast perfect for old-fashioned holidays

MURAT KARASALIHOĞLU

ABOVE LEFT A VALLEY IN THE HILLS ABOVE ABANA, EAST OF İNEBOLU. MIST IS A FACT OF BLACK SEA LIFE. IT CAN BE COUNTED ON TO ROLL OFF THE SEA IN ANY SEASON, KEEPING THE FORESTS DAMP AND, SOME SAY, THE PEOPLE YOUNG

ABOVE RIGHT FEW PLACES ALONG THIS SECTION OF COAST ARE SUFFICIENTLY SHELTERED FOR BUILDINGS TO SURVIVE. DARSU HAS ONLY A MOSQUE AND A FEW DESERTED HOUSES BY THE SHORE. THE REST OF THE VILLAGE IS BUILT A MILE AWAY, UP IN THE HILLS.
RIGHT OLD AND NEW HOUSES IN İNEBOLU LOOK OUT TO SEA





A wall of mountains a thousand miles long runs along Turkey's Black Sea coast. A coastal motorway wedged between the mountains and the sea has ruined the eastern half of this coast, but the western stretches are still some of the most unspoilt in Turkey. There is mostly just a thin strip of shoreline, sometimes none at all, and the sea is constantly eroding the hills. As a result, there is no motorway traffic to wreck the environment – there isn't even a bus from Sinop to İnebolu, the nearest ports to Kastamonu. It is quicker to head inland, they say, than to hug the rugged shore.

But the coast road makes for an enjoyable drive if you have a car. And a trip from Kastamonu makes for a good day's exploring. Head down to İnebolu over the Çuhadaroğlu Pass via Küre, then east along the coast to Abana, and back to Kastamonu over an equally dramatic pass.

Along the coast are pebbly coves and cafés with sea views, places that encourage you to read up on ancient history – the Amazons lived near here, and Xenophon and Jason both sailed by.

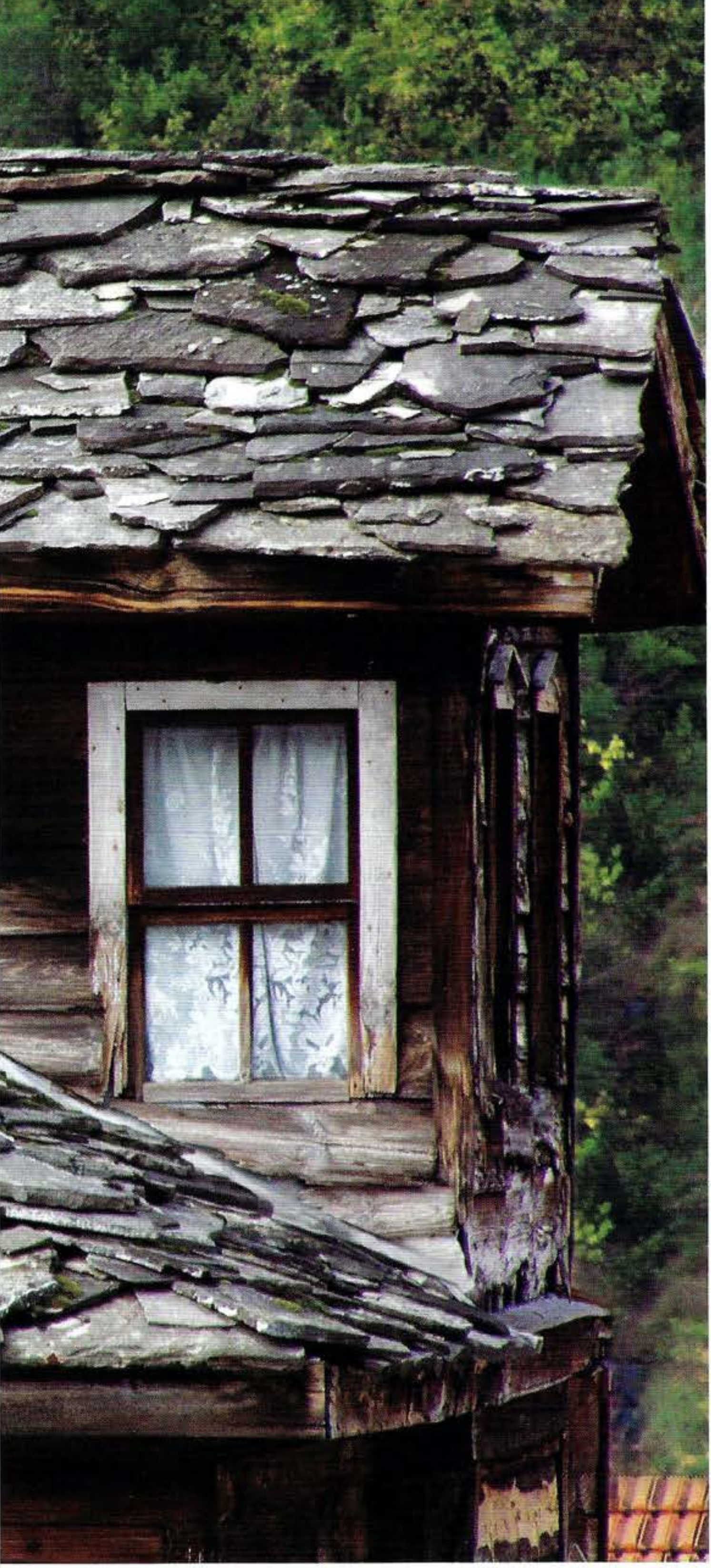
You can drive up into the hills, which are covered with virgin forest. As to the sea itself, if you go in summer, the golden rule here is to swim only where others are swimming, as the undertow can be treacherous.

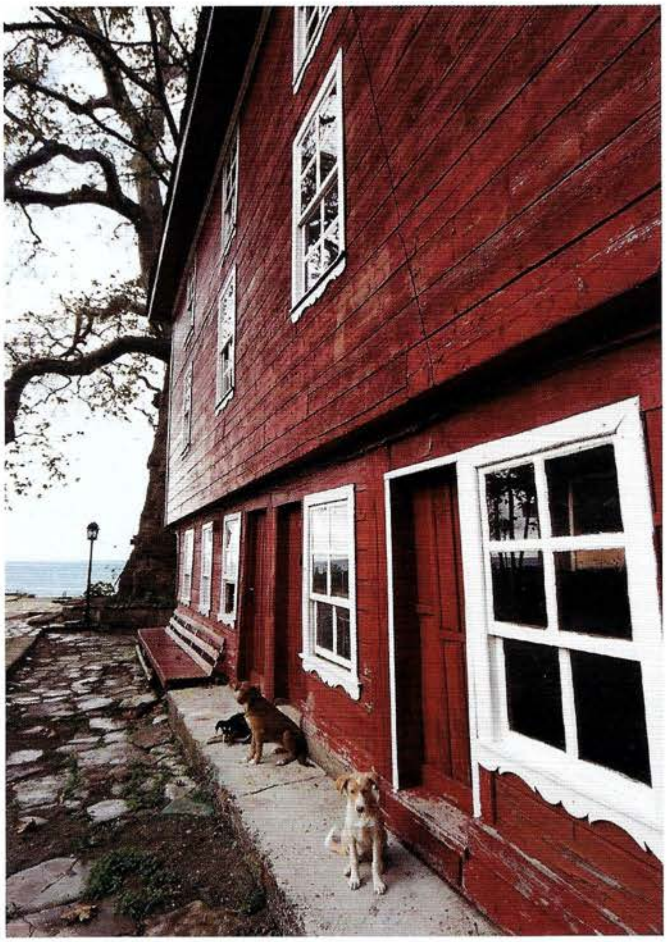
The seaside villages tend to be unprepossessing, even if they do have a certain knocked-about appeal. İnebolu, however, is a prosperous, pleasant town with fine wooden houses that resemble those on the Bosphorus. In fact, it recalls the upper Bosphorus in its quiet charm. And like Istanbul, it has marvellous fish: turbot in spring, and red mullet and anchovies all year round.

İNEBOLU IN A NUTSHELL

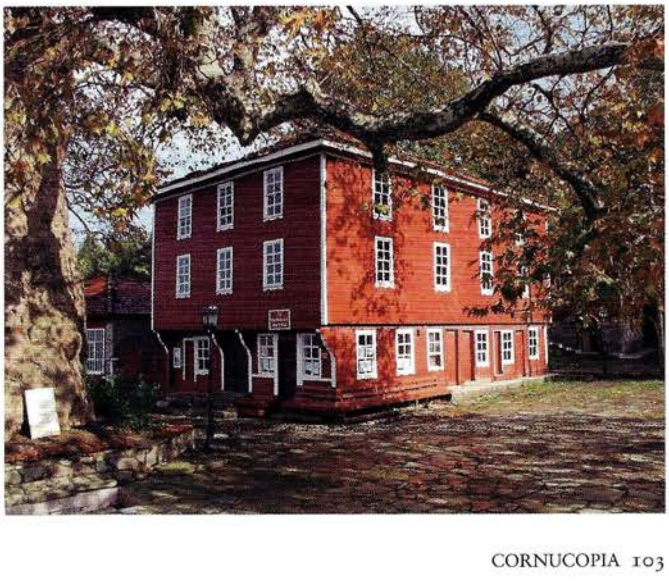
Black Sea storms are formidable events, as any seaman will tell you. The snow in İnebolu can be heavy but melts quickly in the strong winds. Even in warm months, when it averages a mild 21C, the rain can be torrential. Older houses – such as the one above, in a pretty hillside district directly behind the bazaars – have massive tiles that look like heavy slate but in fact are *marla* stone, a locally quarried volcanic rock requiring great expertise to cut.

Market days – Tuesday and Saturday – are the ideal times to visit İnebolu. In autumn, look out for small sweet *kuzu kestane*, or lamb chestnuts, as well as fresh forest mushrooms and a local delicacy, pickled mushrooms. In summer, after a visit to the





MURAT KARASALIHOĞLU



best part of the market, the villagers' bazaar, you will be feasting on wild strawberries and mulberries. It is the women who run both the bazaar and the rural economy. They are extraordinarily productive, and good businesspeople, too, as can be seen in the stacks of wicker

Above İnebolu's stone tiles. Top right Brightly painted 'Kastamonu' chairs in the hilltop Maraz Café. Centre and right The 19th-century seaside mosque at Beldeğirmen (old Niyerze) and a venerable plane tree, which may be 700 years old

baskets, piles of wild herbs, cheeses, butter, honeys, jams and marvellous home-baked bread. Amazon blood must surely flow in their veins.

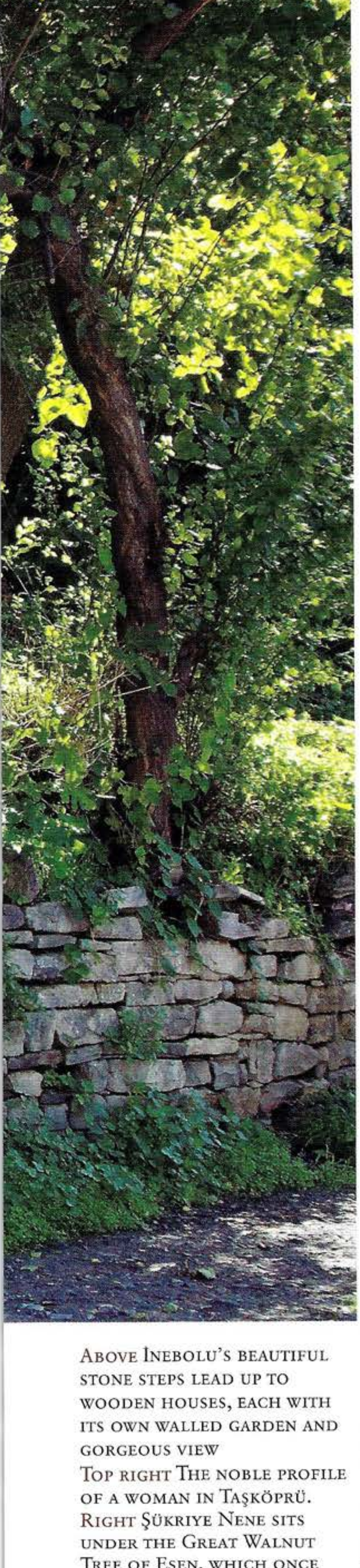
From the market, take the road that zigzags up the hill, following the signs for Geriş Tepe, or climb the romantic steps, past houses painted the classic oxblood red.

İnebolu was always a prosperous place with a thriving merchant class, trading in flax, linseed oil, timber from the still virgin forests, copper from Küre and cereals from upland Kastamonu. Trade extended beyond the Ottoman Empire's borders to Russia and France – on the road you pass a French postal-service letterbox. Nowadays many of the owners of these houses winter in Istanbul and come to İnebolu in summer. The houses' preservation is all the more remarkable given that İnebolu was bombed by the Greek navy in 1921, and many must have been rebuilt. İnebolu's valiant defence, in which women played a key role, is still celebrated.

When you get to the top of the hill, the reward is the Maraz Café, where the coffee and *ayran* (yoghurt drink) are almost as famous as the views of the coast. Sit out on the vine-covered terrace.

From here, carry on along narrow lanes through the steep woods until you lose your nerve and return to the coast road.

If you have a car, the seaside village of Beldeğirmen, with its delightful Nordic-looking timber mosque, is a short drive away. Continue on to Abana for the alternative, no less spectacular route over the hills to Kastamonu. Or simply stay in İnebolu: the comfortable, modern Yakamoz Hotel, right on the sea, has pleasant gardens (see Travel Notes).

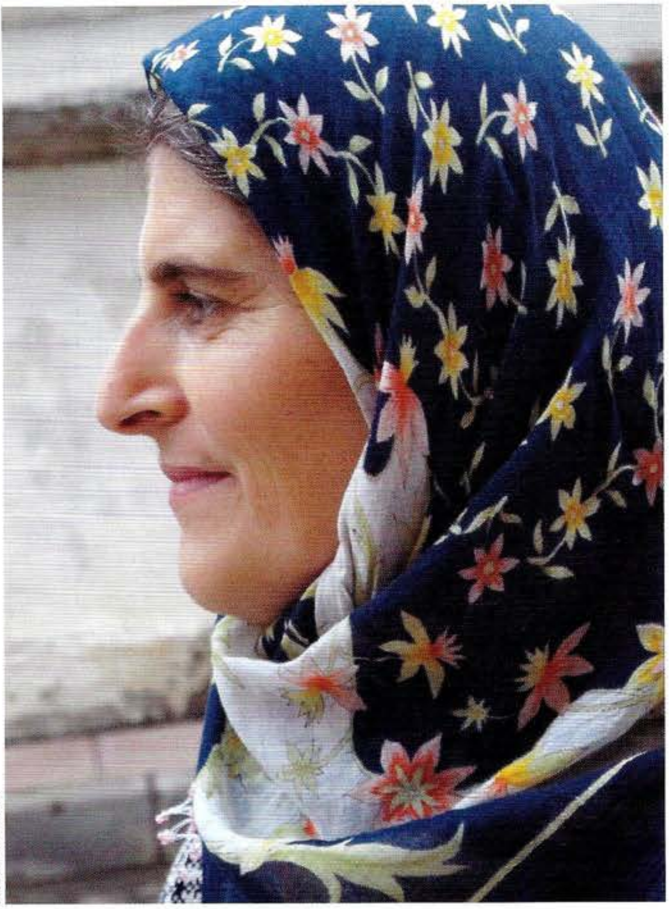


The return to Kastamonu

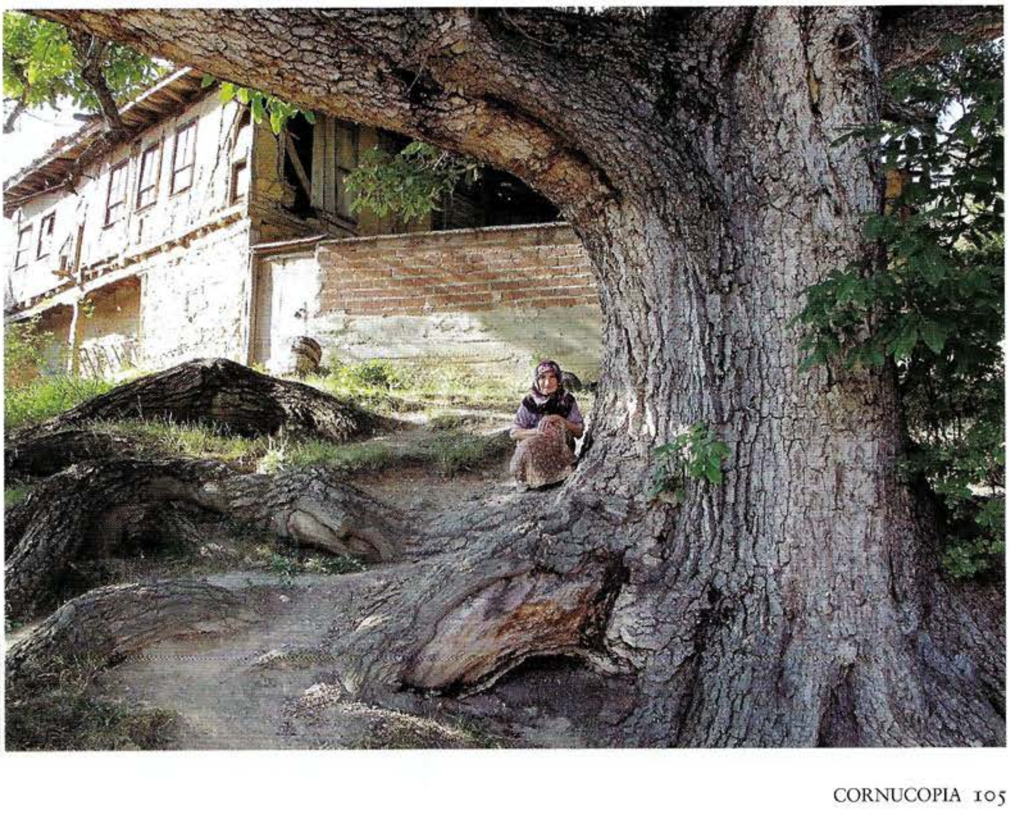
If time allows, consider a lunch of pit-roasted lamb in the market town of Taşköprü (see Travel Notes). Pompey founded a city here in 65 BC after annexing the Pontic kingdom of Mithridates. Pompeiopolis was deserted by the seventh century, and now it is being excavated. Little is visible as yet, but much is promised: the finds are on show in Kastamonu's Archaeological Museum.

Today Taşköprü is best known for its pungent garlic. It also lays claim to the oldest konak in the area: the Sakaoğlu Konak, built in 1654, now being restored by the wealthy Beymen family, who originated in these parts.

A few miles before Kastamonu, look out for a signpost with a drawing of a tree. This is the turning for the village of Eşen, where you will find an ancient walnut tree, possibly the second largest in Europe. A spring bubbles up from its gargantuan roots. It used to belong to the elderly Şükriye Nene, seen here. It is now a national monument.



BERRIN TOROLSAN

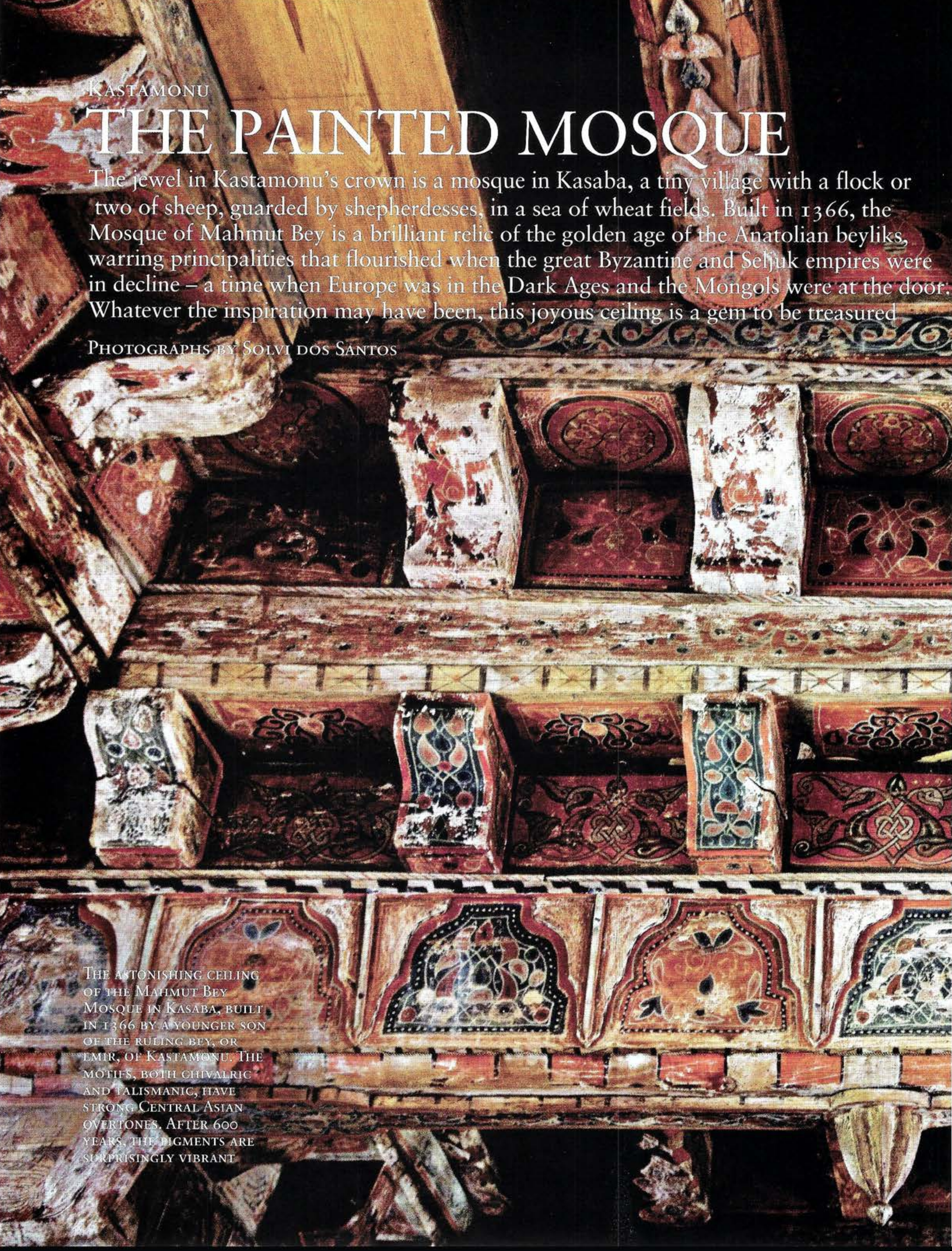


BERRIN TOROLSAN

Above Inebolu's beautiful stone steps lead up to wooden houses, each with its own walled garden and gorgeous view

Top right The noble profile of a woman in Taşköprü.

Right Şükriye Nene sits under the Great Walnut Tree of Eşen, which once belonged to her family. Behind her is the pretty farmhouse where she lives with her single cow



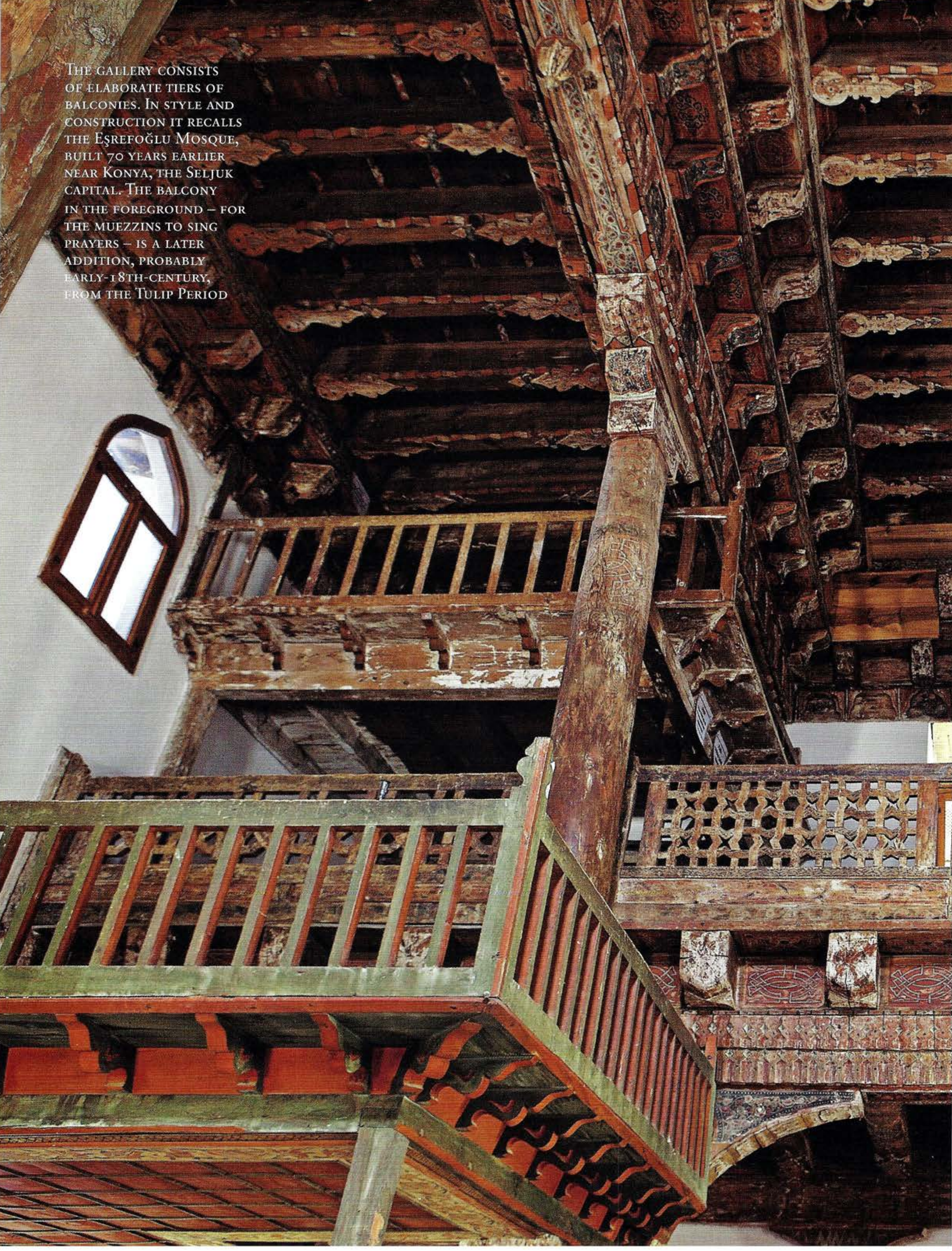
Kastamonu

THE PAINTED MOSQUE

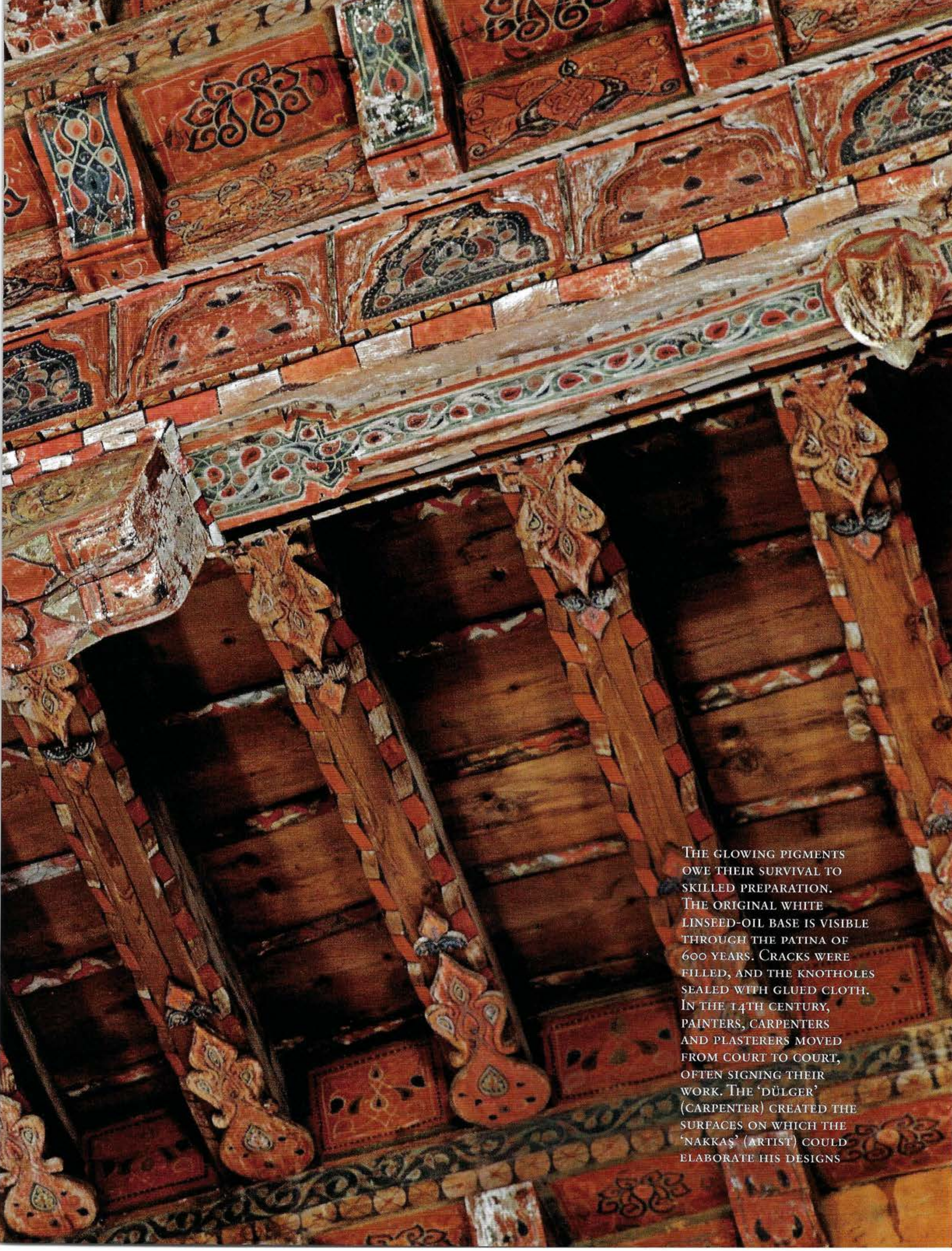
The jewel in Kastamonu's crown is a mosque in Kasaba, a tiny village with a flock or two of sheep, guarded by shepherdesses, in a sea of wheat fields. Built in 1366, the Mosque of Mahmut Bey is a brilliant relic of the golden age of the Anatolian beyliks, warring principalities that flourished when the great Byzantine and Seljuk empires were in decline – a time when Europe was in the Dark Ages and the Mongols were at the door. Whatever the inspiration may have been, this joyous ceiling is a gem to be treasured

Photographs by Solvi dos Santos

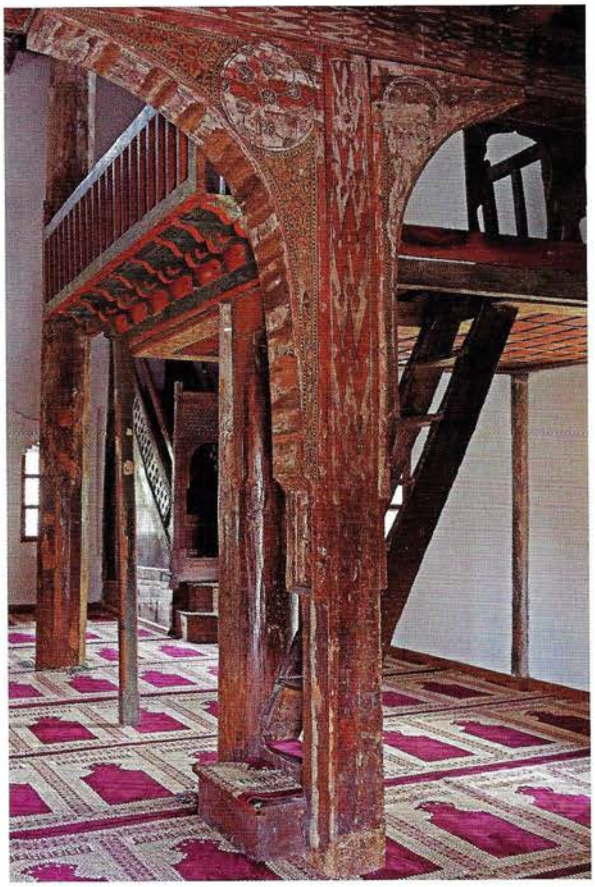
The astonishing ceiling of the Mahmut Bey Mosque in Kasaba, built in 1366 by a younger son of the ruling bey, or emir, of Kastamonu. The motifs, both chivalric and talismanic, have strong Central Asian overtones. After 600 years, the pigments are surprisingly vibrant

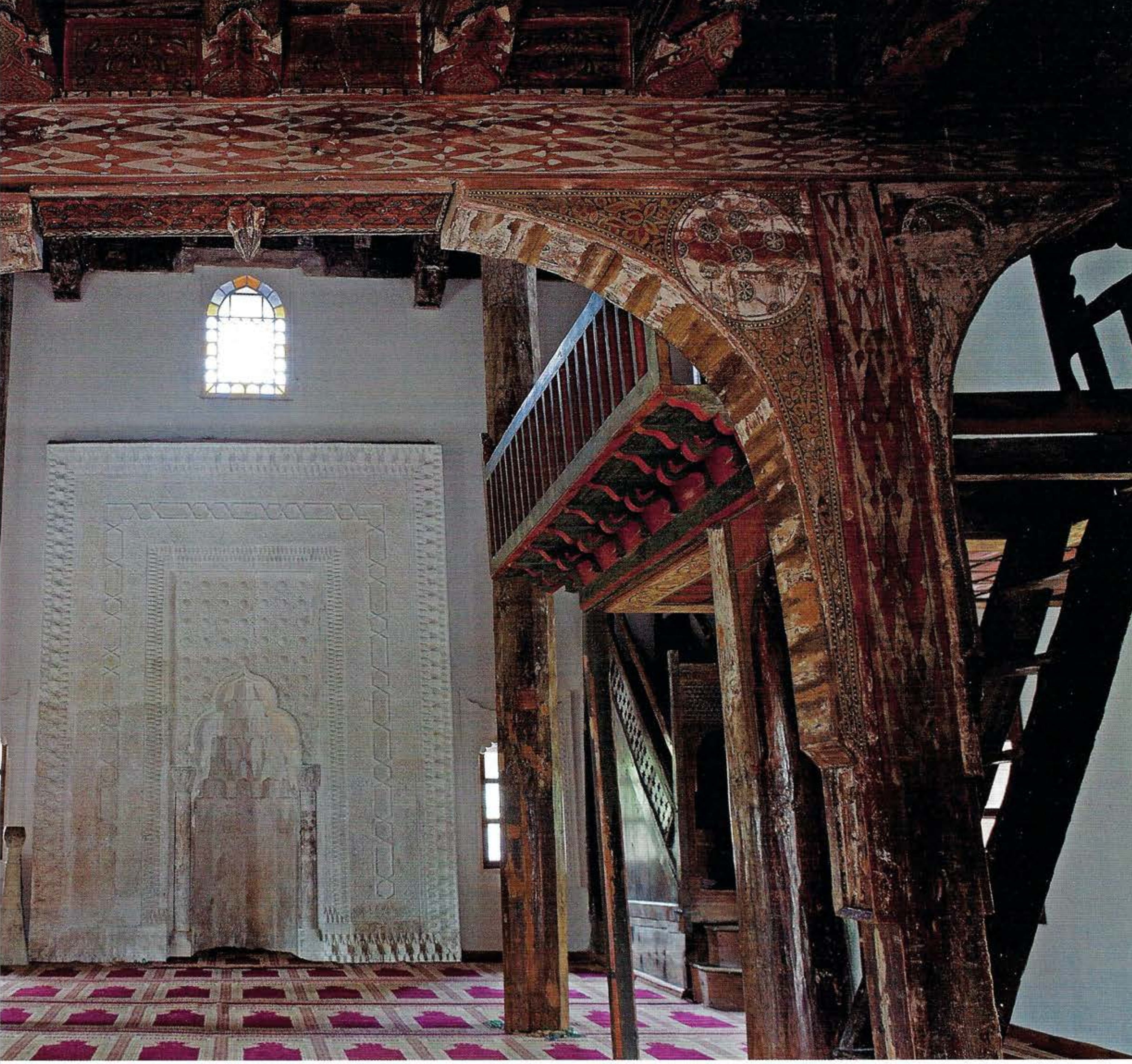


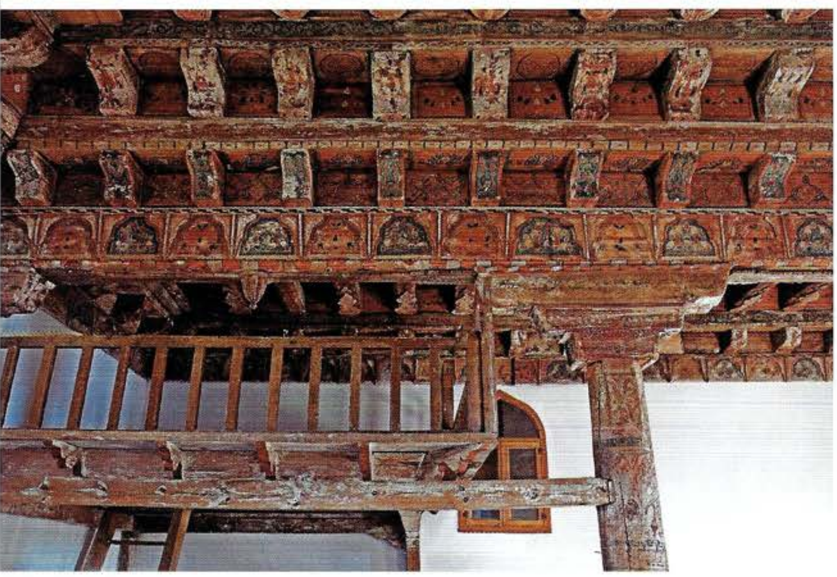
The gallery consists of elaborate tiers of balconies. In style and construction it recalls the Eşrefoğlu Mosque, built 70 years earlier near Konya, the Seljuk capital. The balcony in the foreground – for the muezzins to sing prayers – is a later addition, probably early-18th-century, from the Tulip Period



THE GLOWING PIGMENTS OWE THEIR SURVIVAL TO SKILLED PREPARATION. THE ORIGINAL WHITE LINSEED-OIL BASE IS VISIBLE THROUGH THE PATINA OF 600 YEARS. CRACKS WERE FILLED, AND THE KNOTHOLES SEALED WITH GLUED CLOTH. IN THE 14TH CENTURY, PAINTERS, CARPENTERS AND PLASTERERS MOVED FROM COURT TO COURT, OFTEN SIGNING THEIR WORK. THE 'DÜLGER' (CARPENTER) CREATED THE SURFACES ON WHICH THE 'NAKKAŞ' (ARTIST) COULD ELABORATE HIS DESIGNS

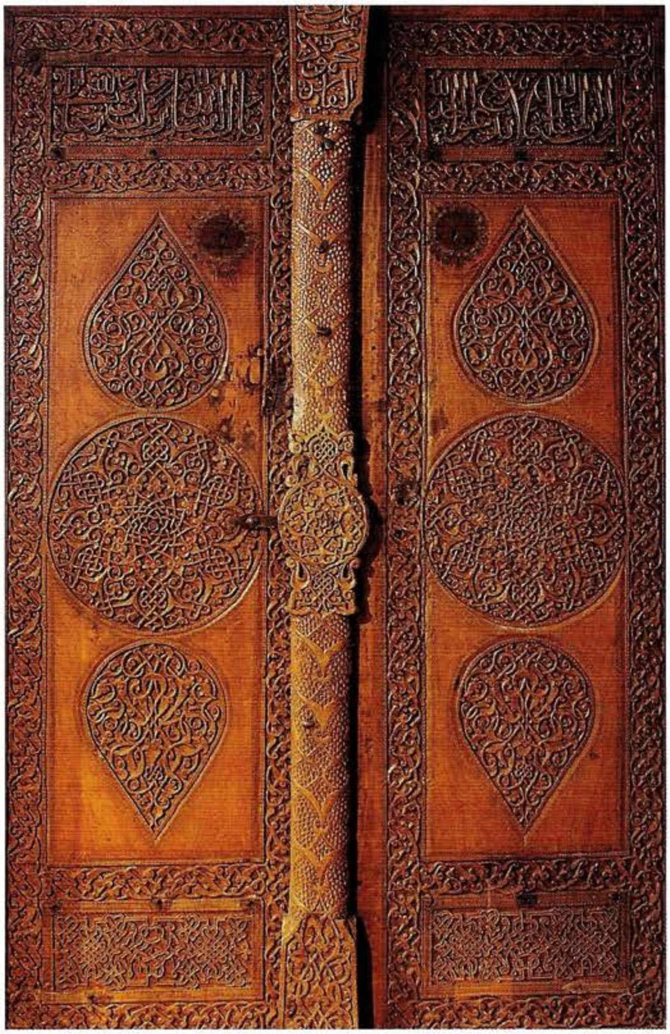






Above The Mahmut Bey Mosque is a simplified version of Seljuk 'forest' mosques, with their many wooden columns. Tall columns frame the stuccoed mihrab, which has fine floral and geometrical motifs. The walls are otherwise bare. The columns flanking the niche are designed to revolve, so as to prove the mosque's structural soundness.

Top left The minber (pulpit) is also thought to be original.
Far left, below The 'mahfil', or prayer-readers' balcony.
Centre left Floral 'Rumi' motifs were painted freehand. 'Hatai' geometric ones were done with stencils. Two very similar hands have been identified.
Left The upper balconies allow a close-up view of the striking paintwork



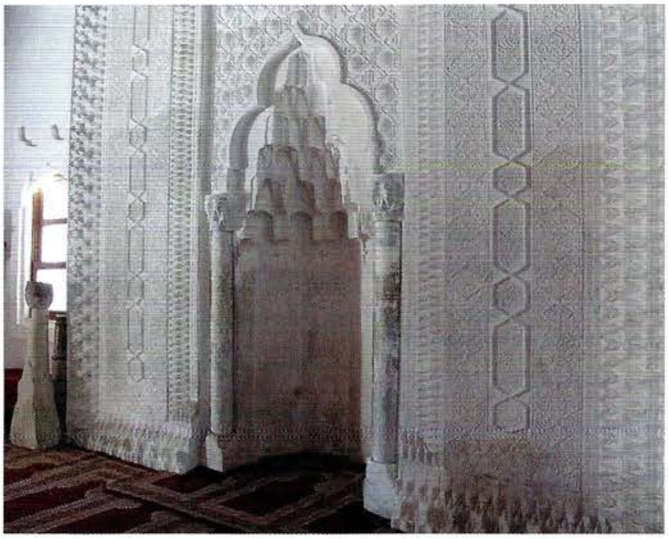
The sleepy village of Kasaba is at the end of a country lane that follows gently rolling hilltops before dropping to a leafy valley ten miles from Kastamonu. You cross a bridge, then ford the river and pull up in front of a crumbling mansion. Opposite is the mosque, a sturdy barn of a building. The windows in the stone walls seem small and few; the wooden minaret is new. There is no hint of the cabinet-maker's dream within.

"Kasaba" gives its past away: it is a nickname, and means "town" – the old name was Ilısu. In the 17th century, 25,000 souls lived here; now there are at most 400. A second old mosque is still in use, and you see ruins of hamams and a great dervish lodge, for the town stood on a lucrative trade route. Ancient stones in the garden suggest that this was always a sacred spot.

The mosque's sophistication should come as no surprise. The commanders who defeated the Byzantines at Manzikert in 1071 were courtiers, too. Many would have ties with Seljuk emperors. The Ottomans, neighbours of the Candarlıs of Kastamonu, soon married Byzantine royalty. And in a visit to Süleyman Bey, Mahmut Bey's great-uncle, who died in 1340, the famous explorer Ibn Battuta describes how, in another mosque near Kastamonu with tiered balconies, the bey prayed downstairs, the judge, scholars and officers on the first floor, and the crown prince on the highest.

What is miraculous is the mosque's survival. The road changed course, the town became a backwater, and no marauding army torched it. Even the doors were recovered after being stolen in 1997. And conservators have been allowed to do their work properly. This is a happy story. With a happy ending, we hope.

- *As the mosque has a full-time guard, it is easy to visit in daylight hours.*
- *For a good essay on the mosque, see www.pbase.com/osmantanidik/kasabamosque*



OPPOSITE DECORATION IS FLORAL AND GEOMETRIC
CLOCKWISE THE MOSQUE AND GARDEN; THE ORIGINAL DOORS, SIGNED BY THE ARTIST, NOW IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM IN KASTAMONU; A PAINTED SHUTTER DISCOVERED DURING RESTORATION; SACRED STONES IN THE GARDEN; THE FINELY STUCCOED MIHRAB

KASTAMONU TRAVEL NOTES

GETTING THERE

The Trans-European Motorway has cut the 500-kilometre drive from Istanbul to Kastamonu down to five hours. Leave the motorway at Gerede and follow the signs for Karabük and Safranbolu, then for Araç and Kastamonu. It is mostly dual carriageway. The cluster of restaurants at Çevrik Köprü, east of Safranbolu, is a good place for breakfast or lunch. The best-preserved village in Turkey, Yörük, is a mile away. An alternative route is via the Samsun highway, turning left at Ilgaz, which takes you high into the mountains, or at Tosya, which skirts the mountains and is the place to go for honey and rice.

WHAT TO EAT

The regional cuisine is tasty and nourishing country cooking – dishes based on pastry and dough made from the flour of various cereals, grills, roasts, and stews cooked with vegetables and dried pulses. Some long-lost staples can be found in markets, such as the earliest cultivated wheat, einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*, or *siyez* in Turkish), used to make a deliciously dense bulgur pilav.

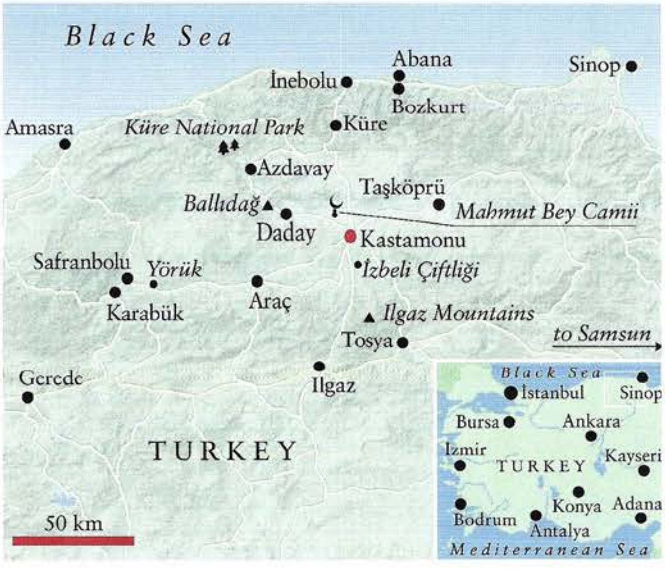
This is a land of "40 soups and 50 breads". The classic Anatolian instant soup, *tarhana*, here contains tart cornelian cherries and is sold in bags (*kızılcık tarhanası*). And there are countless other local soups in the region. Bozkurt has a rustic chestnut soup (*kestane çorbası*); above Araç they make barley-and-yoghurt soup (*arpa çorbası*); İnebolu has a lemony fish soup (*balık çorbası*); Bozkurt, Taşköprü and Tosya all make a gooey chicken congee with pounded wheat (*keşkek*). And creamy wild mushroom soup (*mantar çorbası*) is everywhere in season.

There are various classic dolmas – stuffed vegetables and leaves with mincemeat or rice fillings. One speciality from Araç is onion-and-leek dolma (*soğan pırasa dolması*) – ask for it in restaurants.

Dough-based dishes are a staple. A favourite is *bandırma* – chicken breast wrapped in *yufka* (thin pastry), soaked in chicken broth and served with crushed walnuts. Another is *etli ekmek*, a sort of mincemeat pizza.

And look out for pickled mushrooms, prune compote (*üryani hoşafı*), thirst-quenching sherbet of fresh cornelian cherries, and *eğşi*, a tangy plum drink.

SATURDAY IS MARKET DAY IN THE SEASIDE TOWN OF İNEBOLU. ABOVE SWEET 'LAMB' CHESTNUTS IN THE VILLAGERS' BAZAAR. RIGHT FETİ GÜREL, AGED 67, LAST OF THE TOWN'S FAMOUS SADDLE-MAKERS – DONKEYS AND MULES ARE ESSENTIAL IN THE MOUNTAINS. FAR RIGHT FOREST MUSHROOMS. BELOW RIGHT İNEBOLU'S HOUSES



SUSANNA HICKLING

WHERE TO EAT

KASTAMONU

Hotels with licensed restaurants include the **Uğurlu Konak**, a renovated mansion below the fortress, where you can eat in the garden (the manager, Bülend Çadırcıoğlu, is a mine of information), and the **Kurşunlu Han**, a 15th-century caravanserai in the centre (see Where to stay).

İZBELİ ÇİFTLİĞİ

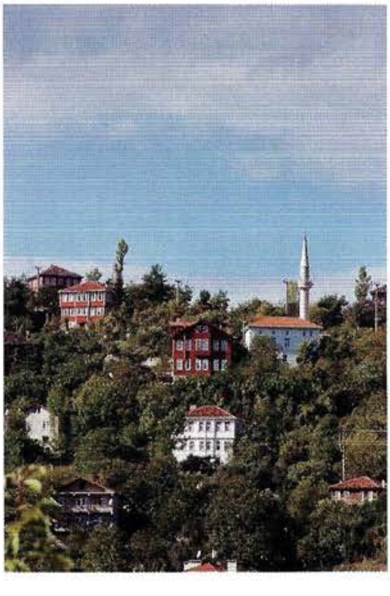
Start with breakfast at the İzbeli farm, on the road to Ilgaz, 10 miles from Kastamonu. Served all day, but booking is essential. Plate after plate of delicious food from the farm's organic produce emerges from a kitchen full of cheerful women.
İzbeli Çiftliği, Kavacık Köyü, Kastamonu; +90 366 244 3645

MÜNİRE SULTAN SOFRASI

A busy restaurant at the entrance to the Münire Medrese, an old school now full of little shops and café tables. The place for your first *bandırma* and *etli ekmek* (see What to eat). Eat in the courtyard if there is space and watch the women chefs of Kastamonu knead and deftly roll out paper-thin pastry cases to hold the filling of your choice and griddle them as you sip a cherry sherbet.
Münire Medresesi, Kastamonu +90 366 214 9666

EFLANİLİ KONAK

A restored konak named after the family who once lived in it, close to the Archaeological Museum. All three storeys are now a restaurant serving a modest regional menu. The plum drink *eğşi*, and fried eggs on *pastırma* (*pastırmalı yumurta*), are good. For lunch the shaded garden is pleasant, but at night the lighting indoors is unfortunate.
Gazipaşa İlköğretim Okulu yanı, Kastamonu; +90 366 214 1340



Kaya Pide Salonu
A tiny restaurant next to the Tabakoğlu Pastırma shop with the best *pastırmalı ekmek* in town: a pizza-like bread with *pastırma* topping, baked freshly.
Mahkeme Altı Sok, Kastamonu
+90 366 214 2336

Hanedan Restaurant
A modern kebab shop near the river serving the local savoury pastry, *etli ekmek*, as well as the usual yoghurty İskender kebab.
Nasrullah Meydanı, Banka Sok 1, Kastamonu; +90 366 212 7171

Altınöz Lokantası (Naila)
Mutton is richer than in Istanbul, but Kastamonu is justly proud of its döner kebab. Nail Usta's is one of the best. The meat is marinated with spices and onion juice, layered with tail fat and grilled over oak embers. Eat with *şıra* (grape juice) or *ayran* (yoghurt drink).
Kasaplar Hal İçi 21, Kastamonu
+90 366 214 5348

Mustafa Çakıroğlu and Hasan Köse
Simit tiridi – rings of bread soaked in broth, served with garlicky yoghurt and a drizzle of paprika butter – is filling but delicious.
Yılanlı Sok 26, Kastamonu
+90 366 214 1525

İnebolu

Şehir Restaurant (Kâzım'ın Yeri)
A quiet, old-fashioned place on the seashore in İnebolu. Choose your fish from their display or take your own from the market or from fishermen selling their catch on the shore. Anchovy (*hamsi*), red mullet (*tekir*) and horse mackerel (*istavrit*) are always good. Black Sea turbot (*kalkan*), far superior to Atlantic turbot, is the real delicacy in spring.
Zafer Yolu Cad 6, İnebolu
+90 366 811 4072

Palmiye Pide ve Kebab
Classic grills and casseroles (*güveç*). They also do breakfast.
Cumhuriyet Cad 32, İnebolu
+90 366 811 4770

Taşköprü Kuyu Kebabı
People come to Taşköprü from far and wide for the brothers Ömer and Osman Yılmaz's pit-roasted lamb (*kuyu kebabı*). Open from May 6 until September serving lamb that has grazed on the herbs of the mountain pastures. It is the only item on the menu and served only at lunch. Eat it in the tiny restaurant or take it away; either way, place orders the day before.
Çarşı içi, 5. Sok 15, Taşköprü
+90 366 417 2547

WHAT TO BUY

Food is high on the list of things to buy in Kastamonu, so plan trips around local market days – find these out from your hotel. In the town, a good place to start – and a good rendezvous – is the central **Münire Medrese**, a former college whose cells are now shops, with a pleasant café in the vine-covered courtyard. Everything from food to hardware is within a few hundred yards.

Food

Pastırma (cured beef, "pastrami" in the West) is usually associated with Kayseri, but Kastamonu's is also excellent. Cured, breeze-dried meat is preserved with or without a casing of *çemen*, a pungent paste of paprika, garlic and fenugreek; the first is eaten as a meze, the latter mainly cooked. The marbling on the meat will tell you how fatty it is. The best cuts are the lean fillet (*kuşgömü*) and the richer sirloin (*sırt*). The

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MURAT KARASALIHOĞLU

vendor will cut it into paper-thin slices. Try **Tabakoğlu Pastırma** (Mahkeme Altı Sok 26, Kastamonu).

BREAD The secret of the exceptional bread must be the combination of locally grown wheat, spring water from the Ilgaz Mountains, and wood-burning ovens. The variety is huge: wholemeal, rye and corn breads; a flat pitta-bread ring, *delikli pide*; and a country loaf baked on aromatic walnut leaves, *yapraklı ekmek*.

CONFECTIONERY Araç is the home of Turkey's most famous confectioner, Hacı Bekir, who started out as a street vendor but whose name is now a big brand. All over the region, makers of boiled sweets, Turkish delight and helva, such as **Başoğlu Helva** (Altıkulaç Cad, İnebolu), still use traditional methods and regional ingredients. *Kos helva* (with walnuts) and *tahin helva* (with sesame oil) are delicious, as are the *marrons glacés* and the preserves of fragrant wild strawberries, rosehips and tiny unripe walnuts.

GARLIC The mineral-and-nutrient-rich soil of Taşköprü produces garlic that is 10 times as pungent as ordinary garlic. The person to buy from is **Mustafa Afacan** (Paflagonya Organik, Münire Medresesi, Kastamonu), who campaigns against fertilisers and pesticides.

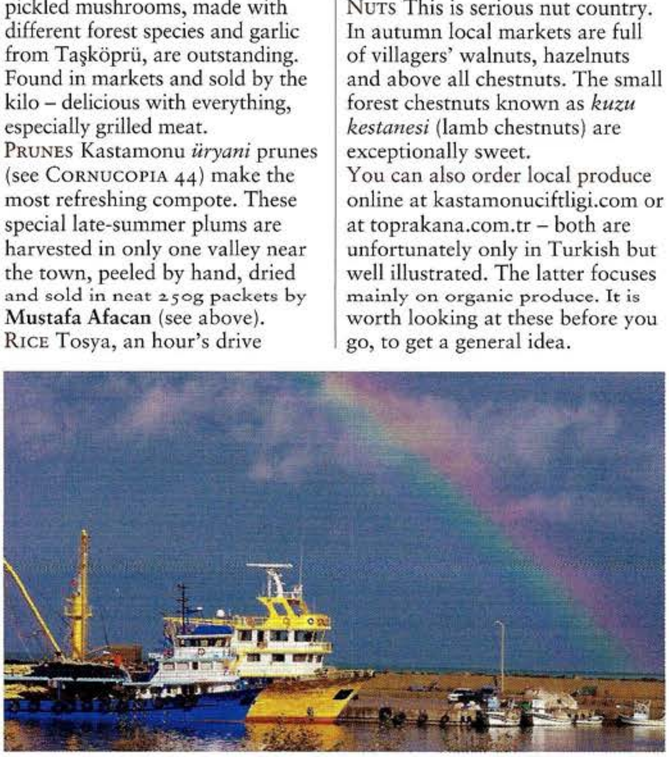
PICKLED MUSHROOMS (MANTAR TURŞUSU) All the vegetables grown in this fertile land are pickled, but pickled mushrooms, made with different forest species and garlic from Taşköprü, are outstanding. Found in markets and sold by the kilo – delicious with everything, especially grilled meat.

PRUNES Kastamonu *üryani* prunes (see CORNUCOPIA 44) make the most refreshing compote. These special late-summer plums are harvested in only one valley near the town, peeled by hand, dried and sold in neat 250g packets by **Mustafa Afacan** (see above).

RICE Tosya, an hour's drive from Kastamonu, is synonymous with rice. It is sold by the kilo in markets and on the roadside.

NUTS This is serious nut country. In autumn local markets are full of villagers' walnuts, hazelnuts and above all chestnuts. The small forest chestnuts known as *kuzu kestanesi* (lamb chestnuts) are exceptionally sweet.

You can also order local produce online at kastamonuciftligi.com or at toprakana.com.tr – both are unfortunately only in Turkish but well illustrated. The latter focuses mainly on organic produce. It is worth looking at these before you go, to get a general idea.



ABOVE JOIE DE VIVRE – WINDOW GARDENING IN KASTAMONU.
LEFT MUSTAFA AFACAN'S POTENT TAŞKÖPRÜ GARLIC.
RIGHT THE TOPRAKÇILAR KONAK, NOW A BOUTIQUE HOTEL.
BELOW BLACK SEA FISHING BOATS

HANDICRAFTS

Kastamonu still has working home looms for cotton and linen, and village women still make trimmings from "nail lace" (*tırnak oyası*, see page 82). Look out for bedsheets woven with alternating strips of linen and cotton – beautifully cool in summer and very good value – and hand-printed cotton tablecloths with ancient Anatolian symbols. Easy to find around Münire Medrese.

For rustic chic as well as practicality, locally made everyday objects are hard to beat: hazel and willow baskets, knives of every description, gardening tools, copper cowbells (and bells for sheep and goats), even bee-traps. Find them in weekly markets and in shops around the bazaars.

WHAT TO SEE

Exploring the countryside is the chief joy of Kastamonu, but it is worth spending a while in town. The **Castle** and the **Clock tower**, either side of the river, are two landmarks with panoramic views. Strongly recommended is a visit to the **Kent Tarihi Müzesi**, the tiny City Museum, on the ground floor of the Vilayet (governor's offices) in the famous square. This is the place to pick up tourist literature and see old photographs and maps. The **Archaeological Museum**, an elegant National Revival building, clearly survives on a shoestring, but has beautiful sculpture from Pompeiopolis and very modern-looking jet-black Bronze Age pots. The **Ethnographic Museum** next door is in the Liva Pasha Konak (the Brigadir-General's Mansion) – a disservice to both the fine house and the good collections, gloomily displayed. Kastamonu's "hat revolution" and lacework are celebrated in a new museum in the **Mimar Vedat Cultural Centre** at the entrance to the town.

WHERE TO STAY

KASTAMONU

UĞURLU KONAK
TOPRAKÇILAR KONAK
Two of Kastamonu's konaks have been converted into good boutique hotels under the same management. The newer Uğurlu Konak, below the fortress, is the more luxurious, the Toprakçılar the more authentic. Easy parking.
+90 366 212 1812/13
mobile +90 543 337 1812
www.kastamonukonaklari.com

KURŞUNLU HAN
A substantial caravanserai in the middle of the bazaars, converted into a hotel and restaurant. The original vaulted guestrooms are small but comfortable.
+90 366 214 2737 or/214 3782
www.kursunluhan.com

İNEBOLU

YAKAMOZ TATİL KÖYÜ
A modern seaside hotel with rooms and cabin-style bungalows, with its own beach and well-kept gardens.
+ 90 366 811 3100 /811 4305
www.yakamoztatilkoyu.com.tr

IONOPOLIS HOTEL
İnebolu's new boutique hotel.
Uğur Mumcu Cad 4, İnebolu
+90 366 811 3755/56
www.ionopoliotel.com

CORNUCOPIA *wishes to thank the archaeologist Murat Karasalihoğlu for sharing his love and knowledge of Kastamonu's heritage; Mustafa Afacan for his insights into culinary traditions; and the İzbeli and Balaban families for their generous hospitality.*

Genetic fingerprint of vinifera in Anatolia
Wines of Turkey
www.winesofturkey.org
www.t2works.com

Private view

Andrew Finkel foresees disaster in plans for a new Bosphorus bridge, enjoys the furore over a costume drama that looks set to run and run, and recalls early lessons in the etiquette of coffee-drinking

The bridge to nowhere?

If a city could weep, Istanbul would have wet shoes by now. Yes, I've written about this before, so I won't repeat all the arguments for why, if Istanbul were to construct a third bridge across the northern neck of the Bosphorus, it would be a historic example of self-harm. "Like building a motorway through a rainforest," Andrew Byfield, the prominent botanist, described it. It would open up to development the remaining region of the city which should be preserved as a source of clean water and fresh air. And it would not for a moment make it easier for those caught in the traffic on the first and second bridges to get to work on time.

The way the decision to build the bridge is being taken is a blow to Turkey's reputation as a functioning democracy, and an example of behind-closed-doors business as usual. The idea that a decision affecting a city's future should be made accountable to its 13 million citizens has simply gone up in smoke.

The idea is so palpably misguided that the bridge can only be built by ensuring everyone turns a blind eye. The highway department says it will put the project out to tender. But there is no feasibility study, no environmental impact study, no document stating why it is necessary and what problems it will resolve. All we know is it will cost $6 billion or more.

One of the clauses in the "omnibus" bill that just went through Parliament relieved the General Directorate of Highways of a requirement to seek planning permission for large tenders. But no democratic society can allow government agencies to do as they choose in defiance of the public good. The father of modern planning, Patrick Geddes, had a simple recipe for getting things right. "Survey, analysis, plan" was the order he put things in. If you decide what you want, fit the analysis to suit the plan, and do the survey last of all, you are destined to get it wrong.

Period dramarama

No such thing as bad publicity? Ask the producers of Turkey's latest costume romp, *The Magnificent Century*. There were 75,000 complaints – and that was just about the trailer, before the first programme was even aired. The series concerns the royal escapades of Süleyman, the eponymous Magnificent, and is styled in the steamy, loose-with-the-historical-truth mode of those other 16th-century TV monarchs, *The Tudors*. Indeed, it is the suggestion that the *Magnificent Century* crowd might have gone shopping on eBay for the Tudors' cast-off doublets and pre-ripped bodices. There is now a cottage industry of "spot the anachronism", from the food on the table and the chairs the characters sit on, to whether Sultan Yavuz Selim had his harem in Topkapı Palace or round the corner in the Fatih. Even politicians have joined the fray. "It is not right to depict the Ottomans in this way," Selma Aliye Kavaf – state minister for women and family, and Turkey's answer to Sarah Palin – told reporters. And she is not the only one to register shock and horror at the suggestion that the heads of the Ottoman dynasty might have shown an interest in sex.

Clearly the series has managed, like a bull in a shop full of kitsch china, to step on some deeper sensibility. Those complaining the most appear to be those who assert a monopoly on misrepresenting history in a way only they deem fit. *The Magnificent Century* has its flaws, but it should be criticised on its own terms. So the self-righteous arbiters of truth should buy themselves a bag of popcorn. They won't be alone. Needless to say, it is one of the most watched programmes on Turkish television.

Café society

This story starts in the winter of my 13th year. The Christmas holiday got off to a poor start when our car hit a tree just outside Sofia. After a month in a Soviet-style Bulgarian hospital, we were bundled into the Orient Express to arrive in a snowy Istanbul. In order to keep me occupied as I nursed my wounds, I was sent several times a week to an apartment in Taksim to learn Turkish. My mentor was Güzin Berkmen, a formidable woman who pioneered the teaching of Turkish to foreigners. While eager that we learn the fundamentals of the language, she was more concerned that we understand the rules of Turkish life. And the most basic was how to drink a cup of coffee.

As our lessons began, the first words I learned were the sugary *şekerli* all the way down to *sade* – plain and unadorned. I may have struggled to put one word in front of another, but as I gently blew the perfect head of froth to the other side of the cup to clear a place to drink, I felt I could taste the new world I had entered. Lesson by lesson, cup by cup, I began to acquire the conviviality and manners the language required.

I continued to visit Güzin Berkmen, and even in her nineties she would make me coffee. So it was in private tribute to her memory that I accepted with alacrity an invitation to a dinner to launch the Turkish Coffee Culture and Research Association. The dinner at the Pera Palas Hotel was a caffeine-friendly affair, from a consommé laced with Turkish coffee to lamb marinated in coffee and milk and served with a coffee-infused *déglaçage* sauce. This was no act of gastronomic chauvinism, a rearguard action against *Nespressos Decaffeinatos*, but an attempt to accentuate the positive. Turkish coffee, after all, had a significant effect on the Western world.

The London coffee house, a place of sober if not always high-minded conversation, was a distinct alternative to the more raucous environment of the tavern. Parisian giants of the Enlightenment – Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau – all frequented the café Le Procope. Sacks of unroasted coffee beans abandoned by the Ottoman armies after the failed 1683 siege of Vienna were, perhaps apocryphally, all that was needed to launch Viennese café society. In England, however, the Ottoman origins of coffee-drinking were apparent in the names of such establishments as the Turk's Head, and in the dress of their patrons. Pepys, Pope and Hogarth all had their portraits painted in turbans.

It is not fanciful – even the German political theorist Jürgen Habermas makes the claim – to see the consumption of coffee as being at the very heart of Western institutions, what Habermas labels the "public sphere", a space where people can assemble to discuss art and politics as equals, free from oversight by the state. The Turkish coffee house (*kahve*), also known as a *kiraathane*, or place of recitation, presumably existed in the pre-coffee mists of time, and is still a place of assembly. Politicians did much of their whistle-stop campaigning in them. I doubt they'd attempt the same in Starbucks.

So forget *grande* and *venti*, or the highly inadequate "tall". Turkish coffee comes in only one size, and an elegant one at that. The real choice, my Turkish teacher told me as she laid the *demitasse* on its saucer, is how much sweetness you require. ◆

The constant gardener

From little seeds do great movements grow, particularly those tended by Victor Ananias, whose death at just 40 deprives Turkey of its most dedicated eco-warrior. The most constant of gardeners, he grew his organic-produce stall in Bodrum market into a wholefood shop, then a restaurant, a publishing house and finally an outspoken, influential organisation that created both the demand for sustainable produce and the know-how to get the job done. His legacy, the Buğday Association, became Turkey's promoter of organic farming and ecological tourism. Those seeds will continue to grow. www.bugday.org

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Village voices

Azize Ethem continues her Iznik diary, relishing the *dolmuş* experience, hoping her local hamam will escape a disastrous restoration, revising her low opinion of goats, and making Turkish friends on the island of Java

I still use the local *dolmuş* occasionally and never tire of the experience. Returning from a rare trip to Istanbul I catch a fast ferry from Yenikapı or Pendik to Yalova, then walk a hundred yards or so to the minibuses lining the kerb. Though there is a timetable for these vehicles, and a printed list of departure times, the time the *dolmuş* pulls out from the kerb bears little relationship to it. We leave when the driver has finished his conversation with a passing acquaintance, or more often when the bus seems not to have an inch of standing room left. This, of course, is an illusion, as there is always room for at least one more passenger, picked up from the roadside further along the route. Shopping bags, cases and boxes cover the floor between the legs of those standing in the aisle.

Often the farmer's wife beside me will start a conversation, which usually prompts others totally unknown to me to tell her exactly who I am. In a country that sells more hair dye than any other I know, a grey-haired foreigner who is mad enough to live in the middle of nowhere is a well-known oddity.

The part of the journey I dread is when we pass the tiny mosque that alerts me to my destination three road signs ahead. Every driver believes he knows where I live and invariably they are wrong. I have to edge my way past the bodies and parcels in the aisle and hover behind him, ready to bellow "Stop!" as he accelerates past the lane through the olive trees.

Years ago I tried to encourage Selim to travel on these wonderful small buses, but he said he wouldn't travel in a vehicle with livestock. I eventually convinced him that his idea of local transport between towns and villages was archaic, and together we caught the *dolmuş* to Bursa. We had hardly gone a mile when a man boarded with a sackful of squawking chickens. It was the only time I ever saw either animals or my husband on local transport.

No room for improvement

Over the past few years much money has been spent on restoring Iznik's historical sites. To my uneducated eye some of them have been over-restored, but that is better than having them fall into ruins. The *stele* built two thousand years ago on what was the road to Baghdad, eight kilometres from Iznik, used to be found by driving down a rutted tractor path. It stood in a peach orchard, towering over the trees and surrounding groves. One had to plod through an often boggy field to reach it. To stand there with the birdsong and the rustle of the leaves always made me feel overwhelmed by the history of the area.

Two years ago the lane was improved, signposts were erected and paths laid. The lower plinth was excavated and it now stands in a wasteland of white gravel. Admittedly, it has far more visitors and I have no right to feel it should have remained the domain of determined seekers of history.

Now work has started on repairing our only functioning hamam. Known as the Hacı Hamza Hamamı, it was built in the late 14th or early 15th century. For years the women's section has been closed, owing to nasty cracks in the dome. My only worry is that it will be turned into yet another cultural centre, and the luxury of a Turkish bath and massage will no longer exist in Iznik. To visit a real, non-touristy hamam is an experience which beats hands down all the fancy spas of Europe.

A better class of goat

Recently I stayed overnight with friends living in the hills above Yalova. They have kindly taken Simba the Wonder Dog to stay with them while I am on holiday. One of their neighbours has a large herd of goats. When we lived in Dereköy, I would often encounter goats as I walked to the village. They were often aggressive and there was definitely a malevolent glint in their eyes. No wonder medieval legends portray the devil with the horns of a goat and that it is the symbol of the Antichrist. In Ottoman mythology the Karakoncolos is a malevolent creature, often depicted with the legs of a goat.

But these animals were different, I was told, the herd being made up of 80 pure-bred Saanen goats. The Turkish Agriculture Ministry is encouraging farmers to upgrade their herds by introducing this Swiss breed. Although they are more expensive, they produce up to five times as much milk and are known to be docile and easy to handle.

I am sure Selim would have heartily approved of the Saanen, as even the word "goat" would cause him to launch into a tirade about the damage to the environment caused by these animals' propensity to debark trees. So now it is possible to have fivefold milk production with diminished tree loss. In the evening I watched them making their way home after a day foraging in the hills. The shepherd was not to be seen and while two dogs gently rounded up the stragglers, the leader of the herd was, most surprisingly, a quietly plodding donkey.

Some things never change

Tomorrow I embark on my winter adventure, and meanwhile I am sitting in a rather swish hotel room overlooking the Sea of Marmara. It is the hotel the family stayed in when we first came to Turkey nearly 30 years ago. I don't remember it being this up-market, but the view has hardly changed. As I watched the sun setting, the fishing boats were heading home. Anglers lined the breakwater and waiters vied to lure me into their restaurants as I walked along close to the old city walls. As I stood there, watching the world go by, an elderly man came out of a small grocery shop with a chair which he insisted I sit on. Once I was seated he disappeared into his shop and returned to present me with a glass of tea. Hopefully, some things will never change.

Making friends in faraway places

I arrived in Jakarta to transfer a few hours later to a flight to Yogyakarta, on the island of Java. For five hours I sat in a departure lounge surrounded by tired Hadjis returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca. Eventually I was befriended by two young and very sophisticated Turkish businessmen. With the aid of their state-of-the-art mobile phones they knew more about why we were stranded than the airline staff. The Indonesian national airline had that morning installed a new computer program to make the running of the company even more efficient. The program had crashed and there were planes on the runway with no crews and crews with no planes.

My Turkish friend miles away in Bali got busy pulling strings with a high-ranking official and eventually I and my two new-found companions were whisked off to a hotel, to be returned next morning for a newly scheduled flight. Eartha Kitt knew what she was saying when she sang, *"Üsküdar'a gider iken"* and whispered, "Oh those Turks". I can only add "God bless those Turks."

Over the past six weeks I have met a number of Turkish families who live here in Indonesia. I have eaten the best Turkish meal I have had in years, cooked by a lady from İskenderun, and in a hotel miles off the beaten track I met a couple from Antalya. At a restaurant in Bali, of which my old friend Çetin is part-owner and manager, I attended a Turkish night where a dancer from Bodrum performed classical Ottoman dances. Çetin is an unpaid ambassador for Turkey, going out of his way to promote his homeland. There are always copies of CORNUCOPIA in his car and in the restaurant. My friends have been wonderful and I have enjoyed every minute, but I have to admit to a little homesickness. It is time to go home, methinks. ◆

Beyond the Orchard, by Azize Ethem (Çitlembik), is available from cornucopia.net, price £6.50

WILD AT HEART

STRAWBERRIES GROWING IN THE WILD ARE GEMS OF MOUTH-WATERING DELIGHT THAT BEAR LITTLE RELATION TO THE SHOWY, INSIPID FRUIT ON SUPERMARKETS' SHELVES. BUT THERE ARE STILL GOOD GARDEN STRAWBERRIES TO BE FOUND. BERRIN TOROLSAN ENCOURAGES US TO SEEK OUT LOCALLY GROWN, SEASONAL FRUIT BURSTING WITH FRAGRANCE. HER SIMPLE RECIPES CELEBRATE THE BEST OF BERRIES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BERRIN TOROLSAN

A BASKET OF BOSPHORUS STRAWBERRIES. THEY MAY BE SUBDUED IN COLOUR, BUT THEIR FRAGRANCE IS LEGENDARY, AND THEY MAKE THE MOST EXQUISITE STRAWBERRY JAM

İffet Evin recalls as a child waking early to the scent of strawberries and the cry of strawberry sellers as they rowed across the Bosphorus to the Asian side

One spring day in the Belgrade Forest, to the north of Istanbul, we discovered a hillside covered in tiny strawberries. They were too tempting. We plucked three or four plants, along with the roots, and replanted them in our small garden on the European shore of the Bosphorus. For almost a decade they have multiplied, invading the garden like a weed, alongside the sweet violets I transplanted from the same woods. They are quite independent, thriving undisturbed beneath the roses. The first minuscule white blooms of May are transformed within 30 days into tiny red berries with an agreeable, fleeting aroma. Snails nibble at them constantly, and visiting birds and children love to snack on them.

A member of the extensive rose family, wild strawberries are part of Istanbul's landscape. But they are also widespread across Turkey and the old Ottoman Balkans. According to the monumental *Flora of Turkey*, the life's work of the botanist Peter Davis, two different species of wild strawberry grow in profusion all over Thrace and Anatolia: *Fragaria vesca* and *Fragaria viridis*.

This reminds me of a story my uncle told me. In the Second World War, when he was an artillery officer serving in Sarıkamış, near Kars on the Russian border, he went riding one foggy morning in the vicinity of the camp, which was at 2,000 metres. When he reached a plain above the camp, he was alarmed to see that his horse's legs seemed to be covered in blood. He quickly dismounted and was amazed to find that the ground was a mass of strawberries and his horse was not injured at all. His men enjoyed eating their fill of the fruit for days.

The French diplomat, physician and traveller François Pouqueville, who was part of Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt and was captured by pirates, heaped praise on the strawberry sherbet he was offered in Ottoman Morea (modern Peloponnese). A century and a half earlier, another indefatigable traveller, Evliya Çelebi, was near Ohrid, in the Balkans, as a guest of the local notable, Ohrizade Bey. He recalled that he and his host had a wonderful time feasting on wild strawberries. And on his way to Budin, in modern-day Hungary, Çelebi found fertile valleys carpeted with strawberries the size of hazelnuts.

Wild strawberries – known in Turkish as *dağ çileği* (mountain strawberries) – grow in abundance over a wide territory. An exiled Uighur lady from Turfan in Central Asia recently told me that, to this day, strawberries are not cultivated in her homeland; basketfuls are gathered in the mountains by children and shepherds and brought down to market. In Turkey, fragrant wild strawberries from the Bolu Mountains and Uludağ, above Bursa, are sold by village boys all along the roadside.

Strawberries are indigenous to both the Old and New Worlds. Cultivation in Europe only began after the colonisation of the Americas. New species such as *Fragaria virginiana*, transplanted by the native Indians from the wild and grown in beds alongside corn, were brought back to Europe by settlers in the early 1600s.

Another species with a much larger fruit, eventually named *F. chiloensis*, came over a century later, in 1711, this time from south of the Equator. Amédée-François Frézier, a French colonel commissioned to spy on the Spanish colonies for Louis XIV, discovered this exquisite fruit being cultivated by the Chilean natives.

After Frézier had introduced specimens to France, accidental cross-pollination between these two American species, and subsequent painstaking selection and cross-breeding by French, English and Dutch plantsmen in the following 50 years, resulted in a hybrid called *F. ananassa*, whose pronounced aroma was said to resemble that of pineapples.

The 18th century saw the dawn of the horticultural engineering of the modern strawberry and its commercial cultivation. At first it was France that supplied English high tables. Then British market-gardeners grew adept at producing their own varieties. In time all large-fruiting cultivars came to be known in France as *fraises anglaises*.

In the first half of the 19th century new varieties quickly spread to the rest of Europe and back to America. Charles White, who wrote *Three Years in Constantinople*, reported in 1844 that there were two kinds of strawberries (*tchilek*) growing in profusion in villages on the European side of the Bosphorus: "pine" and "wood".

Ten years later, Emelia Bithynia Hornby recorded first-hand details of Ortaköy, the Bosphorus village where she lived, in her book *In and Around Stamboul* (which is still in print, although it is typical of books of the time in its clichéd reporting of Oriental daily life).

"The delicious strawberries of our village are now in perfection," she reported in a letter of June 5, 1856. "With very little cultivation, the plants produce wonderfully. Hundreds of baskets are sent to Constantinople." She went on to describe pretty round baskets filled with fresh strawberries, their stout handles threaded on long poles which Greek strawberry-sellers carried on their shoulders. "We got a magnificent dish for three piastres (six pence)," she added smugly. Lady Hornby also described hills covered with strawberry gardens and droves of people arriving from May onwards to picnic and enjoy strawberries freshly picked from those gardens.

At the end of his recipe for strawberry compote, Mahmut Nedim bin Tosun, an Ottoman officer, a gourmet and the author of the 1898 cookery book *Ahçıbaşı* (*The Chef*), warns his readers that European strawberries have no aroma at all and should be avoided.

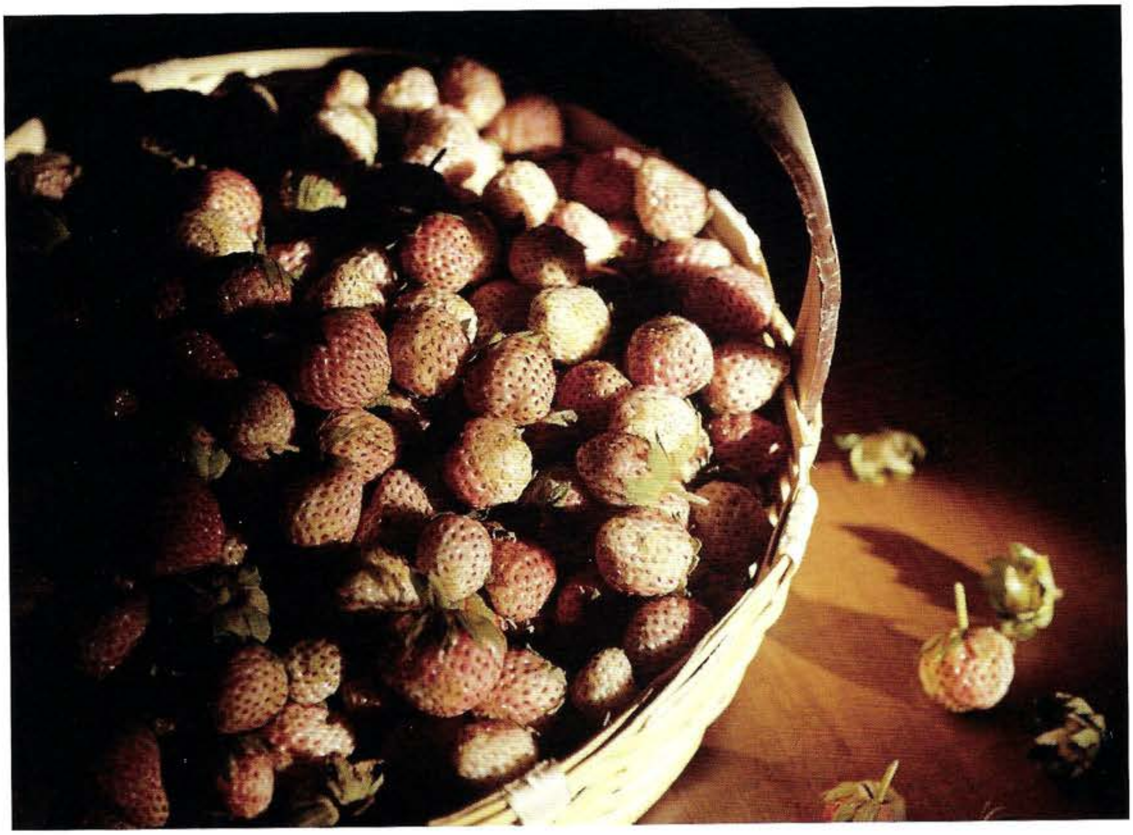
We don't know precisely when strawberries were first cultivated in Istanbul, but thanks to the observations of these witnesses, we do know that by the 19th century at least two different varieties were grown there.

"Oh, those Arnavutköy strawberries… their scent used to waft to the other shore, as far as Vaniköy," İffet Evin writes in *Yaşadığım Boğazici* (*The Bosphorus That I Lived On*), published in 1987. She recalls as a child waking early in the morning to the scent of strawberries and the cry of strawberry sellers as they rowed across the Bosphorus to sell their fruit on the Asian side, where she lived.

Even as late as the 1980s, strawberry jam was made only with this extraordinary variety, and you did not mind travelling some distance to buy them. In my childhood they were sometimes referred to as Ottoman strawberries, which simply meant "old-fashioned". Their perfume was so pervasive that on the return bus journey the passengers would all be sniffing the air and turning to look in your direction.

In spring Bosphorus gardeners used to bring these Arnavutköy strawberries to our door in baskets similar to those described by Emelia Hornby. (In autumn

Strawberries advertised as Arnavutköy or Osmanlı (Ottoman) are still sold in flat baskets, because they are so fragile, and cost 'almost as much as caviar'



PALE BUT VERY FRAGRANT AND INTERESTING: ARNAVUTKÖY STRAWBERRIES FROM THE BOSPHORUS APPEAR BRIEFLY IN EARLY SUMMER

the same gardeners would bring raspberries in cylindrical baskets.) Pale, almost white, with a rose blush and dark burgundy seeds, they are still known as Arnavutköy strawberries, after the Bosphorus village where they were probably first cultivated.

These must have been the ones Charles White referred to as "pine" strawberries. The fruit separates easily from the hull, and the tender berry, with its delicate texture, must be eaten very fresh. It is not difficult to see why they were not popular with commercial growers.

Nowadays in Istanbul strawberries advertised as Arnavutköy or *Osmanlı* (Ottoman) are still sold in flat baskets because they are so fragile and cost almost as much as caviar. Yet, though reasonably fragrant, they are usually pale shadows of their ambrosial forebears. Hybridised with hardier red varieties, they become more colourful and less flavoursome with each passing year. And after two centuries, those strawberry gardens that once carpeted the hillsides have inevitably fallen victim to the developers. Multimillion-dollar flats with Bosphorus views are now invading those rolling hills on both sides of the straits.

Looking back, another variety, known as Bursa strawberries, used to appear on market days in late June. Grown around the Sea of Marmara, particularly on the skirts of Uludağ, above Bursa, they were an attractive sight with their large, heart-shaped fruits and deep crimson colour. This Bursa variety was mainly consumed fresh at the table. It was so sweet that it never needed any sugar. The succulent flesh had a distinctive flavour but lacked perfume. Was it one of the so-called "Frankish", or European, strawberries, or a Bursa gardener's cultivar? We will never know, for this variety has disappeared.

Now, all year round, winter and summer, supermarket shelves display strawberries in cartons. Out of season, large and unappetisingly glossy, they look completely artificial, like plastic fruit. When you taste them they are not remotely related to the strawberries we know. They have turned into vegetables. In modern times, alas, shipping quality and shelf life are considered more important than flavour. But wherever you are, local strawberries can still be found in season – and what a joy they are.

Just as the Latin name of the fruit, *fragaria*, implies fragrance, I wonder if the Turkish *çi*, part of the Turkish word for strawberry, *çilek*, is perhaps related to scent? That same scented syllable is there in the archaic word *çigelek*, still in use in Ardahan, Göle and Şavşat, parts of Turkey neighbouring the Caucasus, and in the Turkic languages of Central Asia – *ciläg* in Tatar, and *çiyäläk* in Azeri.

In his authoritative book *The Strawberry*, the late Dr George McMillan Darrow tells the history of the fruit's journey. He quotes Garcilaso de la Vega, son of an Inca princess and a Spanish conquistador, who wrote a study of Inca culture, *Los Comentarios Reales de los Incas*. Garcilaso recalled seeing his first strawberry when it arrived as booty in Peru after the Spanish conquest of lands further to the south: "Another fruit, which is called *chili*, arrived at Cuzco in the year 1557. It is of excellent taste and very good to eat." A century later the *chili* from Chile was known by its new Spanish name, *frutilla*, the little fruit, and would become the mother of all future cultivated strawberries.

Çilekli Dondurma
Strawberry Sorbet

500g strawberries
125g sugar
2 glasses water
Juice of 1/2 lemon

Fresh ripe strawberries in season give the best results. If you are fortunate enough to have a choice, perhaps mixing two kinds is a good idea, as Fahriye Hanım, author of the cookery book *Evkadını* (*The Housewife*), suggested over a century ago – "fragrant ones for the flavour and deep crimson ones for the intense colour".

1 Rinse and hull the strawberries and leave to drain.
2 Boil the sugar and water to a simple syrup in a deep pan.
3 Whizz the strawberries in a food processor to a smooth purée. Rub this through a plastic sieve set over a bowl to remove the seeds, and strain the lemon juice into the purée without delay, so as to preserve the ruby colour.
4 Add the purée to the hot syrup, cover and leave to cool, then refrigerate.
5 In an ice-cream machine, churn the mixture until firm and store the sorbet in the freezer until needed.

Çilek Kompostosu
Strawberry Compote

250g strawberries
2 glasses water
1/2 glass sugar

This is the best way to turn leftover strawberries – including unripe, tart or insipid ones – into a refreshing compote. The method is simplicity itself.

1 Rinse the strawberries, hull and set aside to drain.
2 Bring the water and sugar to the boil in a deep pan. When all the sugar has dissolved and the syrup has started to bubble, turn off the heat. Add the strawberries to the hot syrup. Cover with a lid and set aside to cool.
3 Before serving, check for sweetness, adding water if it is too sweet for your taste. Serve chilled.

Çilek Peltesi
Strawberry Jelly

500g strawberries (fresh or frozen)
3 glasses water
1 glass sugar
Juice of 1 lemon (freshly squeezed)
2 tablespoons cornflour

This light, slightly tangy, opaque jelly, known in Turkish as *pelte*, is delightful both in looks and taste.

1 Rinse the strawberries. Either whizz them in a food processor or purée by pressing them with the back of a spoon through a sieve placed over a bowl.
2 Bring the water and the sugar to simmering point.
3 Mix the cornflour into the lemon juice and add to the syrup along with the strawberry purée. Cook, stirring, until the mixture thickens.
4 While still hot, pour into individual bowls to cool and set. Serve chilled.

Çilek Reçeli
Strawberry Jam

1kg strawberries, preferably a fragrant variety
1kg sugar
1 lemon

In the days when the fragrant hazelnut-sized Bosphorus strawberries were easily available, these were the ones used for making jam. They were so perfumed that the scent lingered in the house days after the jam was cooked. But any strawberries can be used. With the larger varieties it is best to halve or quarter them. Their deeper crimson colour will give the preserve a jewel-like appearance – less fragrant perhaps, but still delicious.

1 Rinse and hull the strawberries and put them in a deep stainless-steel pan. Add the sugar, cover and leave overnight. The fruit will release its juices under the weight of the sugar.
2 Next day, place the pan over a gentle heat and start cooking, uncovered, checking from time to time that the sugar is not burning, otherwise the colour will suffer.
3 After about 20 minutes the bubbles on the surface should reach the size of little marbles, a sign that the jam is ready. Strawberries contain pectin, so the juice will thicken more quickly than with many other fruits.
4 Stir in the lemon juice, turn up the heat, bring to boiling point and remove from the heat straight away.
5 Ladle the hot jam into sterilised jars, seal and store in a dark, cool place.

Çilekli Parfe
Strawberry Parfait

250g strawberries
250g double cream
120g sugar
Meringue to serve
Fresh mint to decorate (optional)

This delightful parfait can be made with peaches, apricots, raspberries or whatever is in season, but strawberries make the parfait par excellence.

1 Rinse and hull the strawberries.
2 Heat the cream in a double saucepan and when hot add the sugar, stirring until it dissolves. Remove from the heat.
3 Saving the best-looking strawberries for decoration, purée the rest in a food processor or press through a plastic sieve. Stir in the hot cream, cover and leave to cool.
4 When the mixture is cold, pour it into a buttered mould or rectangular loaf tin. Place a piece of greaseproof paper directly on top of the mixture, to prevent ice crystals forming, and freeze.
5 To serve, turn out the parfait and cut into slices. Arrange each slice on a dessert plate. Crush the meringue slightly and scatter over the parfait to give a little crunch. Finish each portion with a whole fresh strawberry and perhaps a mint leaf for colour.

Çilekli Krem
Strawberry Cream

A handful of ripe strawberries
3 egg yolks
7 tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons flour
2 glasses (50cl) milk
Butter

This dessert recipe was given to me by my beloved aunt Habibe a long time ago, during my very first days in my own kitchen. It is the classic *crème pâtissière*, but it was an ingenious way to encourage a beginner. It is simple and unfailing. To end a meal with this silky dessert leaves everyone with a feeling of contentment. Fragrant strawberries are best, but raspberries or ripe bananas are good alternatives. This cream is also an ideal filling for fruit tarts or piped into puff-pastry cases.

1 Rinse the strawberries and reserve a few of the best-looking ones for decoration. Hull the rest. With a paper tissue, dry the fruit without bruising it and set aside. If the strawberries are large, halve or quarter them.

2 In a deep pan whisk the egg yolks with the sugar. Add the sifted flour and mix. Pour the cold milk into the pan, whisking continuously to obtain a smooth texture.

3 Cook the mixture over a gentle heat, stirring until it begins to bubble and thicken. Simmer a little longer to allow the flour to cook completely.

4 Add the strawberries and a few knobs of butter to the hot cream, stir and leave to cool, covered, to allow the cream to absorb the intense flavour of the fruit.

5 Serve chilled in an elegant bowl, decorated with the remaining strawberries.

Çilekli Kolay Kek
Simple Strawberry Cake

A handful of strawberries
1/2 packet biscuits
2 tablespoons butter (melted)
250–300g mild natural yoghurt
150g soft cream cheese
3 tablespoons sugar
1 1/2 tablespoons gelatin
1/2 glass hot water

A version of cheesecake that needs neither baking nor turning out, this cake is very easy to make, light (since the main ingredient is yoghurt), delightfully satiny and altogether irresistible.

Any plain biscuits such as petits beurres or digestives, or even stale leftover sponge cake, will do.

1 Crumble the biscuits and mix in a bowl with the butter. Transfer the mixture to a deep pie dish. Flatten the surface with the back of a spoon. Refrigerate to harden the base.

2 Sprinkle the gelatine onto the hot water and stir to ensure that it dissolves completely.

3 Whisk the yoghurt with the cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Stir the dissolved gelatine into the yoghurt mixture, reserving about two spoonfuls.

4 Spoon the mixture into the biscuit-lined dish and put it back into the fridge or, better still, the freezer.

5 When the yoghurt mixture has set, slice the strawberries and decorate the top of the cake. Spoon the rest of the gelatine over the fruit to give it an appealing glaze. Refrigerate to set further and serve chilled.

Çilek Likörü
Strawberry Liqueur

1kg small, fragrant strawberries
35cl pure alcohol or vodka
400g sugar
50cl water
2 mastic drops (optional)
2 tablespoons sugar

Silva Özyerli, whose liqueurs are renowned, has inherited this recipe from her relations. In Diyarbakır, in southeast Turkey, where her family comes from, it was customary to offer all visitors a liqueur with a cup of Turkish coffee.

I also recall guests in Istanbul being offered chocolates with various liqueurs, home-made or shop-bought. Countless silver, crystal or fine-glass liqueur sets float around antique shops today, witness to this old urban custom. For this liqueur, Silva Hanım chooses the small, scented wild strawberries of spring. The mastic (hardened resin drops of the *Pistachia lentiscus* tree) is an optional addition. According to her, mastic deepens the aroma without dominating the taste. If you cannot find pure alcohol, then vodka is the answer.

1 Rinse and hull the strawberries and pack into a glass jar. Fill with alcohol to cover and replace the lid. Store in a cool place away from sunlight for 30 days. Shake the jar from time to time.

2 After 30 days strain the contents of the jar through a sieve lined with muslin.

3 Heat the sugar in water, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Set aside to cool, then stir in the strained strawberry juice.

4 Pound the mastic drops with two extra tablespoons of sugar and put into a clean jar. Pour the strawberry syrup over, seal and store once more in a cool, dark place. Forget about it for around 40 days while it slowly matures.

5 After 40 days the liqueur should have lost its alcoholic edge. If not, leave it for perhaps a week or two more.

6 At the end of two months the liqueur is certain to have achieved its customary velvety mellowness. Then strain it one last time, pour into bottles and keep in the fridge to be enjoyed with desserts or to accompany a cup of strong Turkish coffee.

Berrin Torolsan: bt@cornucopia.net.
For cookery articles in past issues, see cornucopia.net/cookerylisting.html

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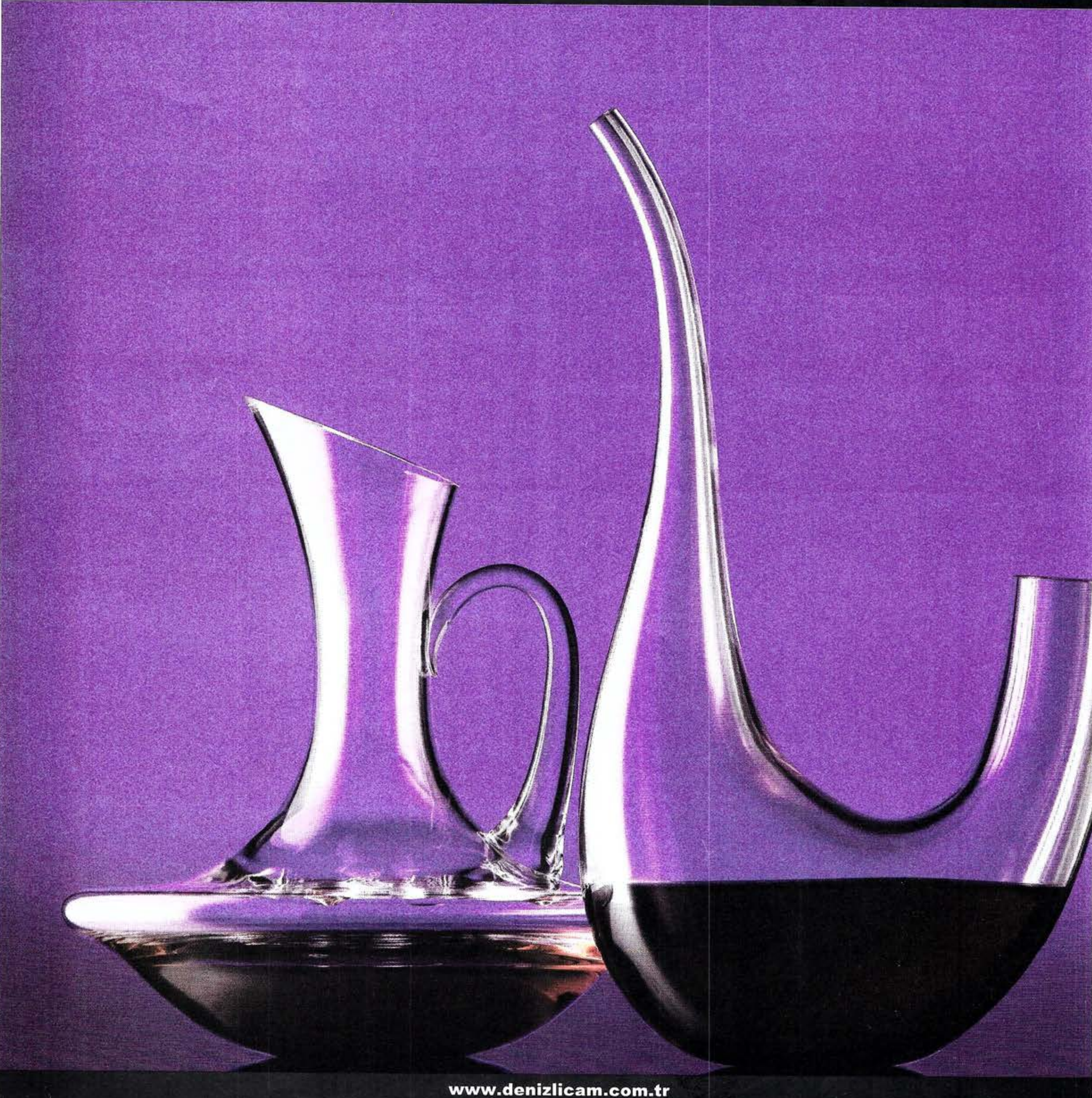

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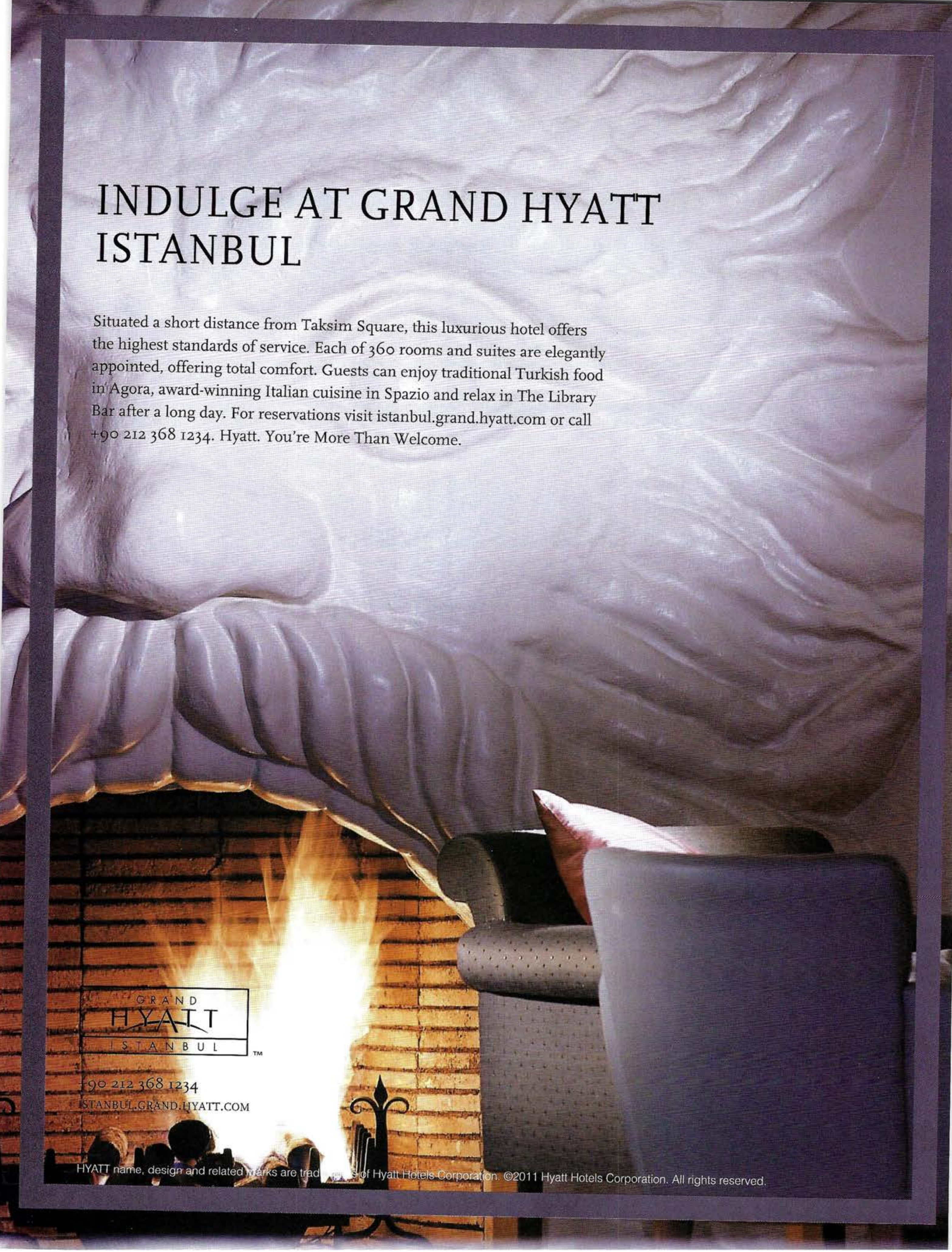

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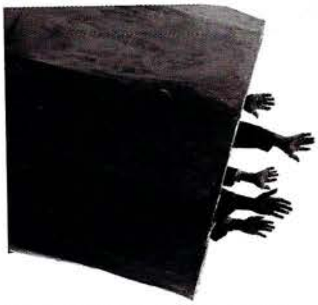
Hands up for Turkish art

There's a buzz about the contemporary art scene in Turkey as collectors splash out millions on the hottest talent.

William Greenwood on a happy mix of money and creativity



Glad hands: a still from Kutluğ Ataman's video installation 'A Journey to the Moon', 2009

Istanbul now has the fourth-largest number of billionaires after London, New York and Moscow, and they're out to spend money on art. Not just any old art, but some of the most up-to-the-minute, cutting-edge art being created anywhere in the world. The contemporary art scene in Turkey is booming, thanks to a happy conjunction of economics, patronage and, obviously, artists. Indeed, the state of the arts in Turkey is the opposite of that in the US or Europe, which are now in what Christopher Knight of the *Los Angeles Times* has described as "suspended animation".

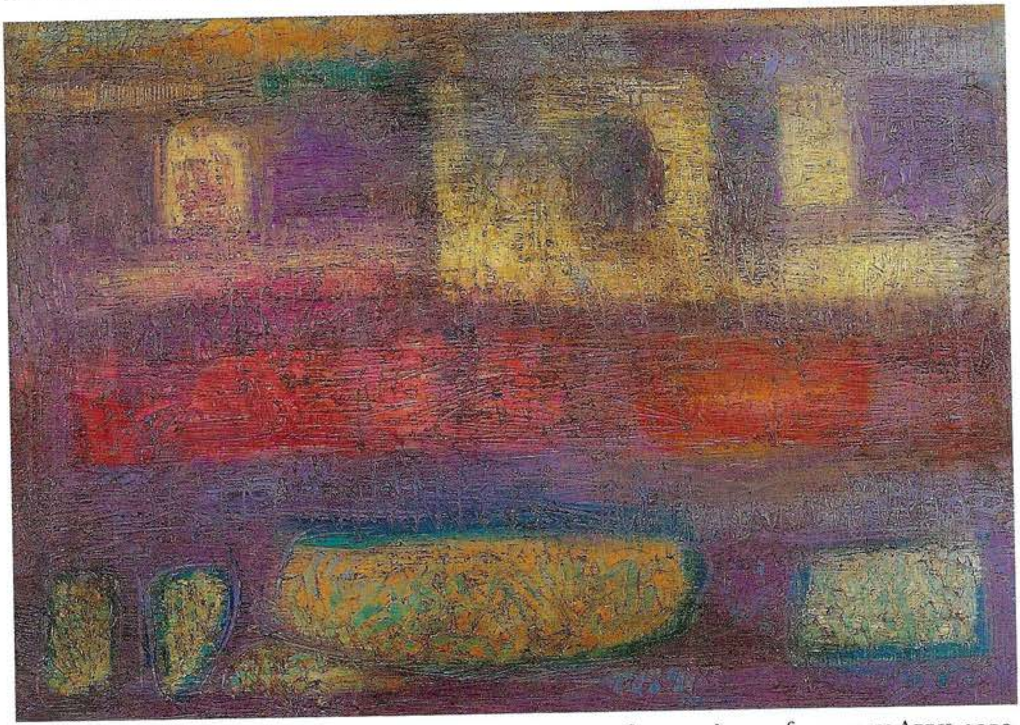
Of course, excellent artists abounded in Turkey long before the current hype. Over the last 20 years, the Istanbul Biennial and the Contemporary Istanbul art fair have made Turkish art more visible. Works by artists such as Fikret Akay and Emre Hüner are part of Tate Modern's collection in London, and Kutluğ Ataman, basking in the glow of a well-received Istanbul Modern retrospective, was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2004. Also, Hossein Amirsadeghi and Maryam Homayoun Eisler's recent publications – *Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey* and *Art and Patronage: The Middle East* (see overleaf) – have provided quality reference books on Turkish art and its patrons.

The current boom has its roots in the stabilisation of the Turkish economy after 1987. Economic stability is a prerequisite for collecting. As Kerimcan Güleryüz, owner of the influential X-ist gallery, argues, "The willingness to collect comes only after you've dealt with the essentials." The Turkish economy weathered the storm during the recent recession, which created a richer, more confident Turkish art market, and a somewhat poorer Euro-American market looking for bargains. Both of these factors led to large-scale investment in Turkish contemporary art. Now auction houses and dealers are taking notice of its potential.

Sotheby's was the first to offer a purely Turkish contemporary art sale, in 2009, and in April 2011 Bonhams will join the fray with its own dedicated Turkish sale. These auctions have led to record prices for modern Turkish art. At the second Sotheby's sale, in 2010, highlights included Fahrelnissa Zeid's *Untitled* (1958), the first modern Turkish work to exceed $1 million at auction, and the rising star Taner Ceylan's seductive *1881* (from the *Lost Painting* series), which more than tripled its original estimate to sell for £121,500. This year, Sotheby's is expecting great things from Mubin Orhon, whose *Untitled* (1963) is estimated at £200,000–£300,000, while Bonhams has put a £280,000–£340,000 estimate on Erol Akyavaş's *End of Encounter*.

The Koç, Sabancı and Eczacıbaşı families are pumping millions into building collections, while Turkish banks have continued to provide support for contemporary artists. This positively Renaissance mixing of money and creativity has led to some criticism. The art historian and curator Necmi Sönmez has lambasted the Turkish scene for being "harmless, decorative, hyperrealist and still a monopoly of sales-oriented dealers and the private, mainly bank-sponsored, art spaces and museums". It's true that the overtly political or mildly pornographic work of artists such as Extramücadele or Burhan Kum suggests a degree of immaturity. However, much of the art being produced now is highly engaged, politically and socially. There is a lack of the kind of censorship seen in Middle Eastern countries, and the in-your-face provocation of such works is, in and of itself, politically charged. As the art historian Ahu Antmen puts it, the past 20 years in Turkey have seen "a creative effort in which the politics, as much as the aesthetics of representation, played an important part".

The writer and publisher Hossein Amirsadeghi takes issue



Fahrelnissa Zeid's 'Gris de Coeur', 1958, which sold at Sotheby's for £43,250 in April 2010 with Sönmez's negative view, stating that commerce is always the driving force behind art. At the same time, investing in art is a very brave move indeed: "The risk taken by a dealer, a gallery, a collector or a private sponsor is risk pure and simple. It can blow up in their faces." And institutions such as Arter, the Koç family's massive new gallery in downtown Istanbul, provide a forum whereby the public can engage with challenging new art. As Melih Fereli, senior consultant at Arter, puts it, the role of the wealthy collector is that of a "private institution providing a very public service".

Having seen the meteoric rise and catastrophic fall of prices in the Indian and Chinese contemporary art markets, one might predict a similar outcome with Turkish art. But Güleryüz believes that an art "bubble" is not necessarily something to worry about: "Handled properly, it could even be a good thing; when bubbles burst it's all the bad art which loses value. Good art never loses its worth." Ada Elgiz is not so sure, pointing out that no Turkish artists have gained a level of fame comparable to those further east. She also notes that "the scene is only just developing here – a Turkish bubble is going to take a long time to form!"

With the 12th Istanbul Biennial approaching, could this be Istanbul's time to join Paris, London and New York as a world-class art hub? "Five years from now," says Fereli, "when we look back, it will become clear that Istanbul has, for a while now, been positioning itself as a major art centre."

BOOKS

UNLEASHED: CONTEMPORARY ART FROM TURKEY

edited by Hossein Amirsadeghi (TransGlobe, £48)

ART AND PATRONAGE: THE MIDDLE EAST,

edited by Hossein Amirsadeghi (TransGlobe, £55)

There has been a dearth of good English-language texts on contemporary Turkish art, so these two striking volumes shed welcome light on a complex subject. *Unleashed* explores the wave of artistic creation currently flowing through Turkey, while *Art and Patronage*, though it covers the entire Middle East, provides useful information on Turkish collectors.

In addition to profiles of Turkish artists, galleries and art-world movers and shakers, *Unleashed* offers some interesting articles, including Ahu Antmen's timeline of Turkish art from Osman Hamdi Bey to the present day, and Irit Rogoff's study of regional factors in Turkish art. *Art and Patronage* deals less with the art than with the Middle Eastern people and institutions who buy it. More than 100 collectors, prizes, museums and initiatives are profiled here. Turkish patrons featured include Suzan and Güler Sabancı, Oya Eczacıbaşı, Füsün and Faruk Eczacıbaşı, Ahmed Kocabıyık, Nezih Barut, and the Koç initiatives. There are also three unusual essays, the best of which is Hans Ulrich Olbrist's "The Future of Art and Patronage", which looks at current trends in patronage before predicting how collectors and collections will function in the years to come. Elsewhere, Anthony Downey critiques current art-collecting practices in the region, while Layla S Dibia looks at the history of patronage in the great Islamic empires. For the collector, scholar or anyone else with an interest in the art of Turkey and the Middle East, these two books are highly recommended. ◆

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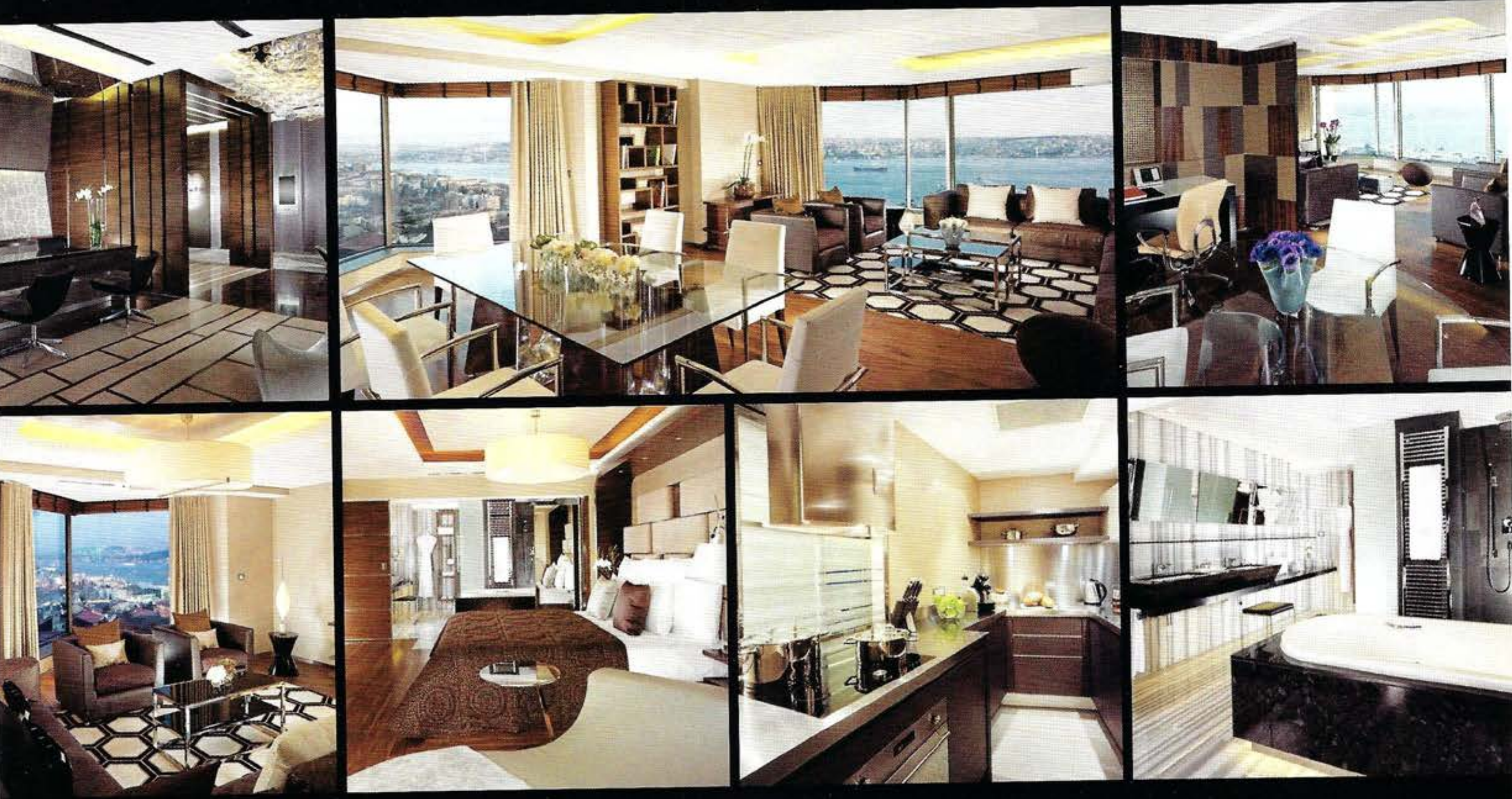

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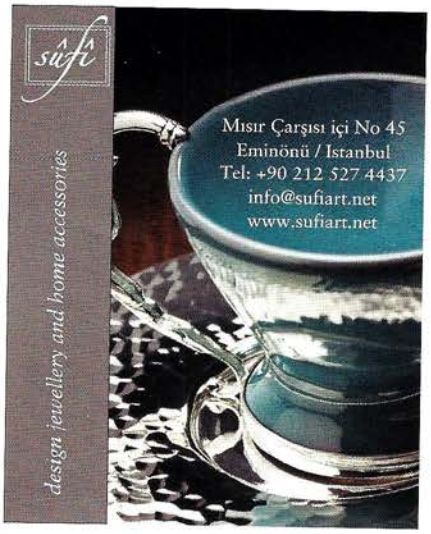
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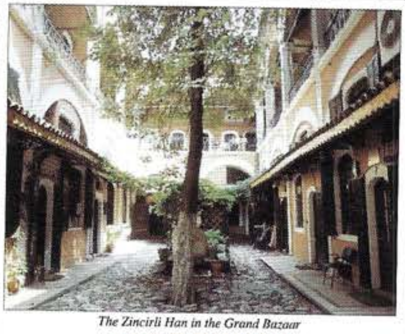

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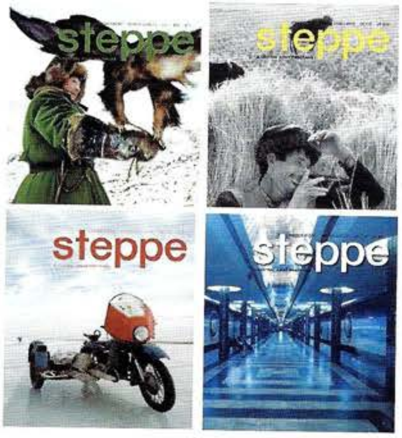
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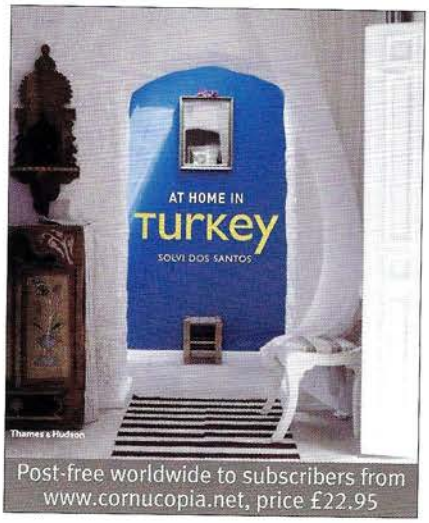
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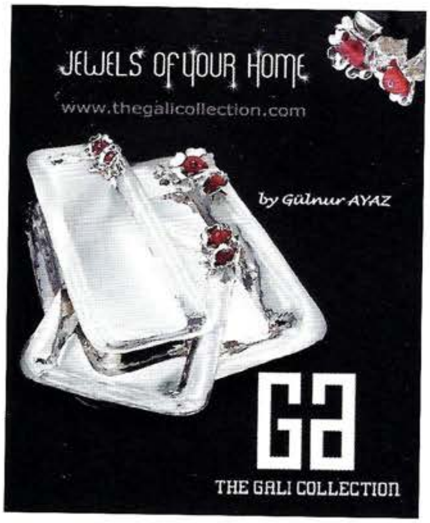
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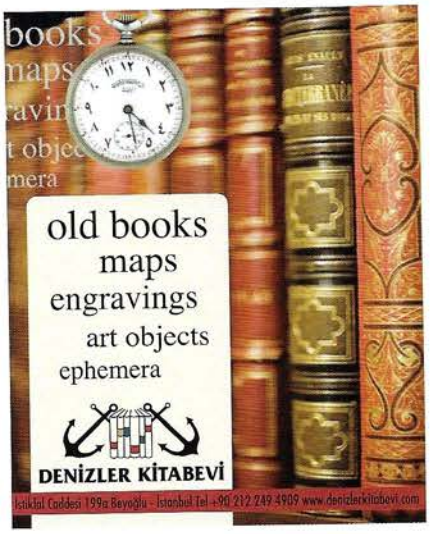
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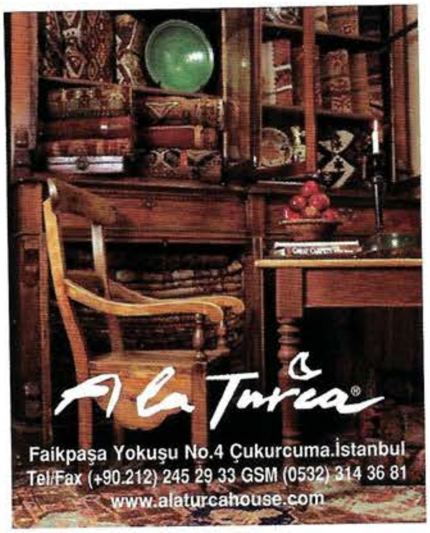
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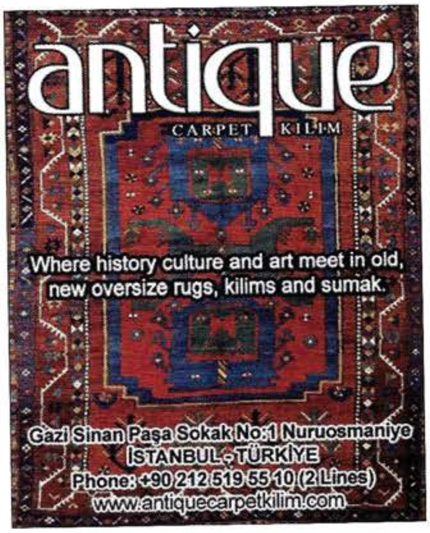
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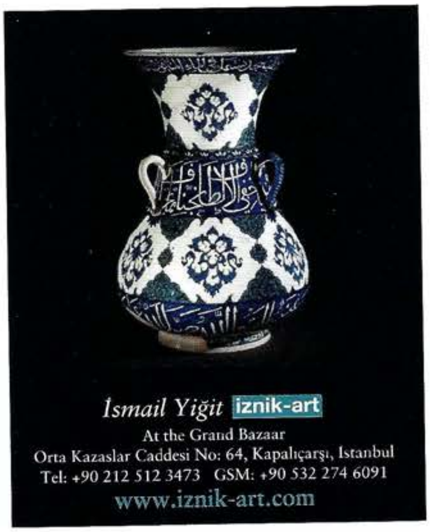
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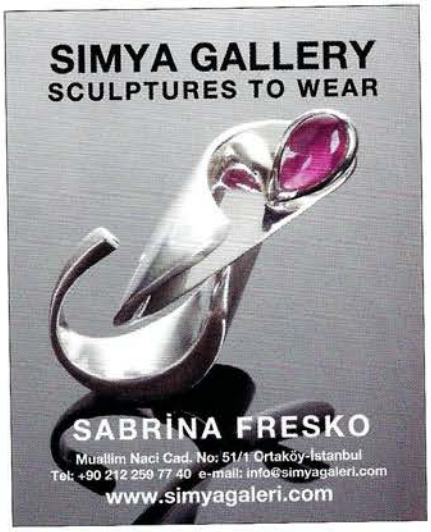
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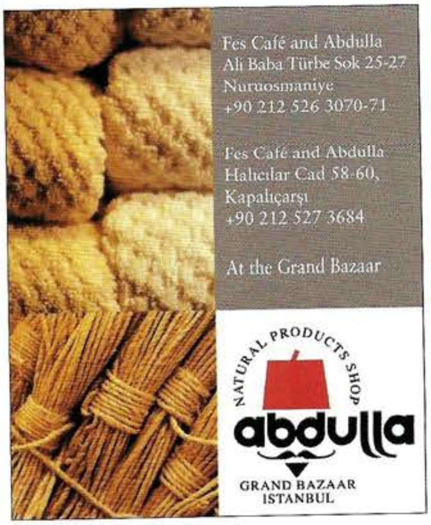
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The art of smart dining

ANDREW FINKEL SAMPLES A SELECTION OF ISTANBUL'S SMARTER CITY-CENTRE RESTAURANTS IN SEARCH OF A TRULY MEMORABLE DINING EXPERIENCE

Dining out in Istanbul is no longer an innocent pleasure. Which is not to say there aren't still places where the proprietor orbits between the kitchen, the tables and the cashier's desk and where it doesn't matter if the fried fresh anchovies have gone a little limp or the haricot beans are a wee bit waterlogged, since no matter what you order, the bill is pretty much the same and, anyway, the real reason for being there is to share a glass with friends. But pretty much anywhere with culinary pretensions these days is going to cost you an arm and, if you have that extra bottle of wine, a leg. So, like the punk in *Dirty Harry* debating whether to risk reaching for his gun, the question you have to ask yourself before you hire the babysitter and order the cab is just how lucky you feel.

It's not always easy to give the answer. Take Abracadabra, a comfortable conversion of a four-storey mansion in Arnavutköy. It is impossible not to be impressed by the relaxed feel, the open kitchen where the cooks threaten at any moment to break into song, plus the benign extroversion of the owner, Dilara Erbay, who by dint of personality makes you decide you must come back for another meal even before you sit down for the first. But despite the laid-back menu boasting organic, free-range everything, the food tends to cross the line from creative to weird. You can't go wrong with the starters, but I wasn't impressed by my confit of duck and was totally flummoxed by its accompaniment: a cold pasta served with fruit and mayonnaise like a Waldorf salad. Alongside *joie de vivre*, you need a controlling hand.

The same criticism does not apply to Mimolett, which has a very precise, formally elegant feel. The chef, Murat Bozok, has worked his way up through some top kitchens outside Turkey to create a bit of urban chic in the heart of Istanbul. But I cannot but wonder if his much-publicised quest for a Michelin star has not turned him into his own worst enemy. From the very first taste of a not exactly exciting canapé-like *amuse bouche* of creamy goat's cheese on a perfectly round raw beetroot "wafer", you never stop asking yourself whether he makes the grade. I applaud the Mimolett approach, which, like Abracadabra's in its very different way, tells you that the reason for going to a good restaurant is not to be seen but to savour the food. On the other hand, I couldn't help feeling there was something didactic about all the flawless symmetry and modest portions, that you were being cooked at and not for. I did, in fact, enjoy the skilfully cylindrical rabbit meatball starter, but the Bozok school of flavours opts for subtle rather than intense. The fresh vegetable spaghetti hiding under the John Dory was also moreish, if only there *had* been more. Mimolett used to serve a reasonably priced lunch menu on which confit of salmon (I imagine it was cooked *sous vide*) was the nicest thing; it is still on the à la carte menu. I also had a rice pudding soufflé, an ingenious parody of the Turkish pudding, but whereas the fluffy top half was fragrant with mastic, the bottom had bits of inedible sticky rice. I can still taste the tarte tatin I ate decades ago at Pierre Koffmann's three-star La Tante Claire. Maybe in time the one at Mimolett will be worth the detour.

Would I go out of my way to revisit Ulus 29? The answer is an emphatic yes. Yet I can understand why this stylish bit of Turkish high life may not be to every tourist's palate. If you went to Paris to find an authentic neighbourhood bistro you might be alarmed to find yourself seated at La Tour d'Argent. This is where Istanbul society comes to dine and also to be dazzled by a spectacular view above the Bosphorus straits, and if you are afraid of a high drama with your aperitif and your foie-gras-laden millefeuille, best to go elsewhere. It is not just a restaurant but a bar and an after-hours club, and there's a sushi chef as well. But it is a restaurant that understands its clients very well and is not afraid to put Turkish charcoal-grilled meats on a menu with black cod or a really engaging red curry and coconut milk soup.

Ulus 29 is capable of genuine sophistication, ample portions and some very toothsome sweets, among them an ensemble that included mango ravioli, passion fruit ice-cream and a chocolate mousse that tasted all the better for arriving in an old-fashioned toothpaste tube. The dining room also has a more-than-agreeable sommelier who gets genuinely excited by anyone showing any interest in what's on their plate. He took very earnestly our desire not to break the bank and introduced me to the Corvus label of Turkish wines, for which I am grateful. The result was a family celebration that turned into a memorable treat. ◆

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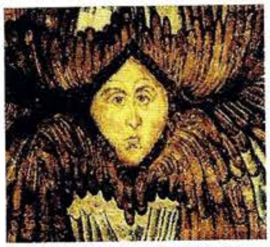

A seraphim uncovered in Aya Sofya

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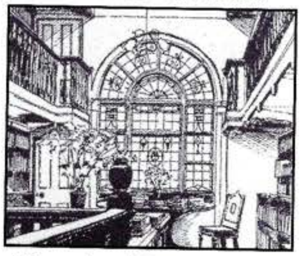

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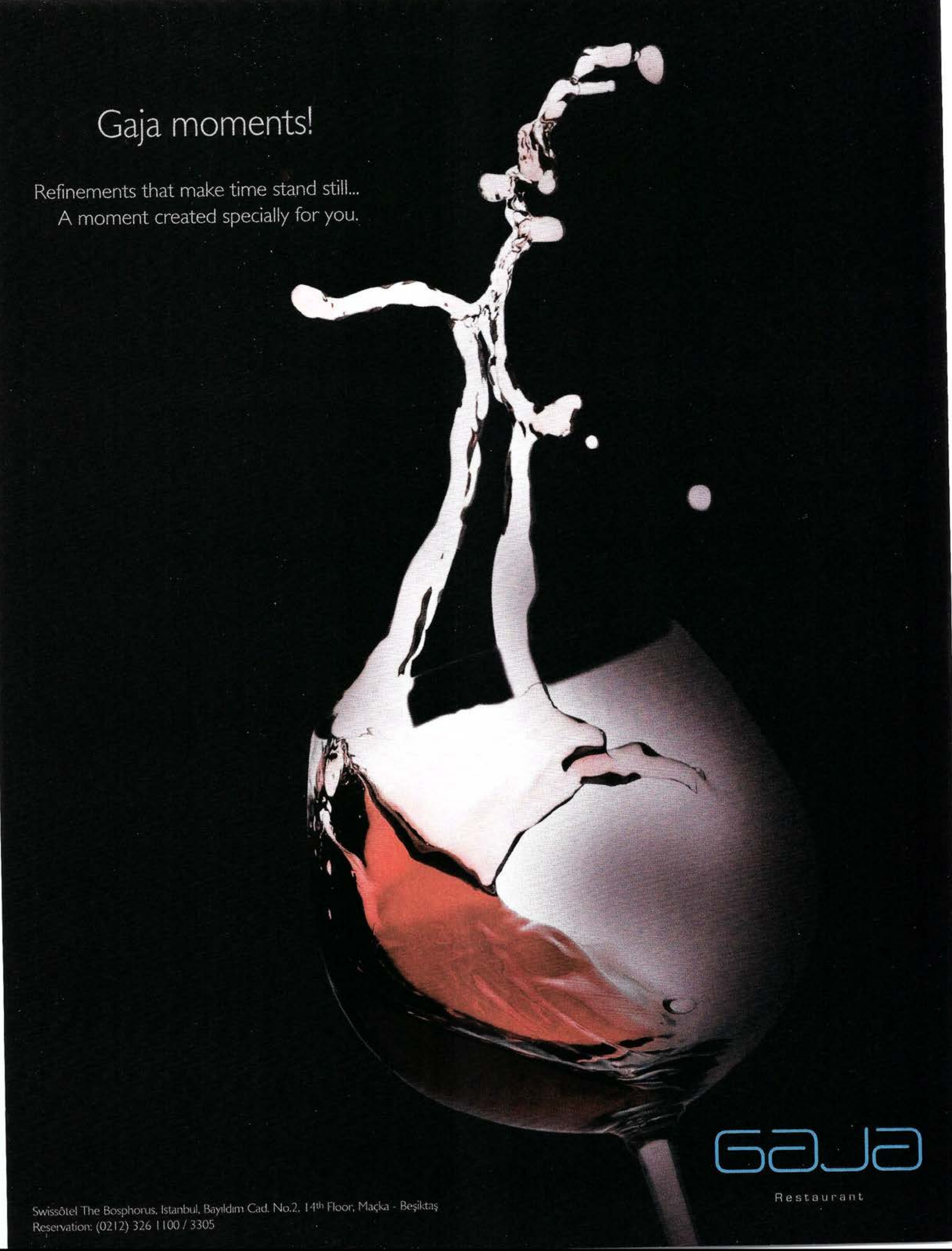

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Turkey's happy hour

At London's inaugural Wines of Turkey jamboree, Kevin Gould hears how the country's winemakers are cultivating a taste for their distinctive products

Great wines are born in the vineyard, receive their education in the winery and grow up in the cellar. Great wine industries take longer to mature. Until 10 years ago, the Turkish wine industry was dominated by two major producers, Doluca and Kavaklıdere, and by Tekel, the state monopoly. A revolution has taken place, freeing small winemakers from Tekel's one-handed grip, and Turkey now produces a pleasing range of mass- and hand-produced wines.

The next stage is to bring together producers small and large, to give them a voice in the international market. With their home wine market growing only slowly, Turks must export their wines if they are to prosper. So welcome, then, Wines of Turkey, a commercial organisation designed to get producers heard both in government circles and in export markets.

Its director is Taner Öğütoğlu, who produced the inaugural Wines of Turkey Conference and Tasting last month at Vinopolis on London's South Bank. On that cold, sunny morning, nearly 300 British and European wine importers, retailers, writers and experts sat under huge vaulted brick ceilings to hear the Turkish ambassador, Dr Ünal Çeviköz, open the conference by telling us: "Penicillin cures, but wine makes you happy, and happiness is the best cure." We applauded his sentiment and brevity, and were introduced to Dr Patrick McGovern, who runs the Biomolecular Archaeology Laboratory for Cuisine, Fermented Beverages and Health at the University of Pennsylvania.

Pat McGovern's presentation showed that Turkey is one of the places (together with Georgia and Northern Iran) where wine was first made, sometime between 8500 and 6000 BC. Glamorously bearded, Pat is the Indiana Jones of Wine, an archaeologist who travels to remote places in search of early winemaking civilisations. Indiana Pat showed us slides of the tomb near Gordian of either King Midas or his father, where amphorae were discovered bearing traces of tartaric acid, denoting wine. He also showed us Hittite drinking vessels, one inscribed "Eat, Drink and Be Merry", and a shot of the source of the Tigris, where the huge wild vines were the first to be domesticated by humans.

After Pat came Jancis Robinson, the best-read, best-respected and best-dressed wine writer we have. Jancis applauded the great strides forward taken by Turkish winemakers in the past decade, and noted with pleasure that a recent fashion for over-oaking seems to have passed. "Wines are great emissaries for Turkey," she said, praising the winemakers' ambition, and adding a hope (much echoed by the rest of the gathering) that international grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Shiraz and Sauvignon Blanc might be blended with Turkey's indigenous grapes to create distinctive, delicious wines.

Dr Jose Villamouz is the world's leading grape geneticist. He has worked on vine genome mapping with Professor Gökhan Söylemezoğlu, head of the department of horticulture at Ankara University, and together at Vinopolis they showed us how DNA typing proves that the upper reaches of the Tigris were where wild (male and female) vines were first cross-bred to become hermaphrodites, the precursors of the world's wine-producing grapes. "There is no question," Dr Jose said, "that Turkey was a cradle of wine, and of language, too. His linguistic family tree showed us how Hittite is the mother and father of all Indo-European languages.

Professor Gökhan then let us get our tongues around a blind tasting of five wines made from indigenous varieties. Emir (white) was fresh, lively, with good minerality; Narince (white) had elegant structure and a pretty nose; of the reds, Kalecik Karası was tart and fresh; Öküzgözü showed itself as serious and powerful, with a balanced finish; Boğazkere was bold and tannic, with tremendous potential for blending.

After lunch there were excellent masterclasses by Charles Metcalf and Tim Atkin MW, and a Grand Tasting of wines by Kavaklıdere, Doluca, Kayra, Likya, Pamukkale, Selendi, Sevilen and Vinkara.

The conference and tasting were impeccably run by the events and PR specialist Redmint, and succeeded in getting Turkish wine to be taken seriously by the most serious people in the trade.

But what next? The impression gained by talking to the gathered experts is that Turkish wines are ready to become important, respected players in international wine markets. Turkey's wealth is in its native grape varieties, some of which demonstrate extraordinary potential for blending with international varieties. The dynamism and ability of Turkish winemakers to procure expert consultants and investment so as to further professionalise the industry will be key, as will their appetite to band together under an umbrella organisation such as Wines of Turkey.

Turkey's tourism successes mean that the market for its wines is ripening, and the country's economic successes have created a thirst among intelligent producers to improve and become world class. Having spent long years in the shade, Turkish wine's time in the sun is near. ◆

For future Wines of Turkey events, see www.winesofturkey.org

Keven Gould is author of *Dishy* (Hodder) and *Loving and Looking with Reckless Abandon* (Quadrille), both available from cornucopia.net/books.html

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Zeytin Konak Hotel – Alaçatı, Çeşme

A hotel in 4 separate mansions full of charm, with 2 swimming pools and gardens green all year round. Peacefully located 5 minutes' walk from the centre of Alaçatı. Massage, yoga, fishing, windsurfing all available. Hand-made soaps attest to the delightful attention to detail. Traditional village breakfast and home-made jams.

www.alacatizeytinotel.com info@alacatizeytinotel.com

Tel 90-232 716 8081

Sedirli Ev – Alaçatı, Çeşme

Sedirli Ev, a charming, small hotel with eight distinct rooms, offers the intimacy and comfort of a homely, peaceful haven. Relax with a drink in beautiful surroundings by the pool and the cool stone walls in summertime, or sit cosily by the fireplace in winter. Enjoy a delicious home-made breakfast by the poolside in the garden.

www.sedirliev.com
info@sedirliev.com

Tel 90-232 716 9271 Fax 90-232 716 6565

Mehmet Ali Ağa Mansion – Datça

This is a unique museum hotel set in the almond, olive and lemon groves on the Datça peninsula. The Ottoman konak was built in 1809, its frescoes lovingly restored. Swimming pool, private beach, 18 rooms in a choice of modern or traditional style. The hotel's Elaki Restaurant is famed for its wine cellar and regional cuisine.

www.kocaev.com info@kocaev.com

Tel 90-252 712 9257 Fax 90-252 712 9256

Empress Zoe – Sultanahmet, Istanbul

Each room is airy and full of charm in this delightfully peaceful small hotel just a minute's walk from Ayasofya, Topkapı Palace and the Arasta Bazaar. Breakfast is in a secret courtyard garden of cypress and palm trees next to the romantic ivy-clad ruins of a 16th-century domed hamam covered with wild delphiniums and snapdragons.

www.emzoe.com info@emzoe.com

Tel 90-212 518 2504 Fax 90-212 518 5699

Gamirasu Cave Hotel – Cappadocia

One of the finest cave hotels in Cappadocia, the Gamirasu is located in an painstakingly restored 12th-century Byzantine monastic retreat. All 30 rooms are beautifully designed in harmony with the surroundings. New swimming pool, horse riding, hot air ballooning, Turkish cookery courses.

www.gamirasu.com info@gamirasu.com

Tel 90-384 354 5815 Fax 90-384 354 5864

Museum Hotel – Uçhisar, Cappadocia

'Wonderful, artistic, one of a kind,' writes an ecstatic visitor to this painstakingly restored Uçhisar house hotel with dramatic views over Cappadocia's tufa landscape. Each of the 18 suites and 22 rock-carved rooms with their beautiful stone arches is lavishly furnished and offers every mod con and comfort. Unforgettable.

www.museum-hotel.com
info@museum-hotel.com

Tel 90-384 219 2220 Fax 90-384 219 2444

Divan Çukurhan – Ankara

This truly exclusive Preferred Boutique hotel occupies a lovingly restored 16th-century caravanserai at the heart of historic Ankara, within a few minutes' walk of the Ankara Citadel and the world-famous Museum of Anatolian Civilisations. There are 19 rooms, each individually decorated in its own unique style.

www.divan.com.tr info.divancukurhan@divan.com.tr

Tel +90 312 306 6400 Fax +90 312 306 6429

The House Hotel – Nişantaşı, Istanbul

Istanbul's smartest shopping street, Abdi Ipekçi Caddesi now has a new designer hotel, hidden away above Prada, where you have breakfast in the uber-chic library-dining-reception space. A cousin of the elegant House Cafés, it brings together high luxury and attention to every detail with Autoban's cutting-edge design.

www.thehousehotel.com info@thehousehotel.com

Tel 90-212 244 3400 Fax 90-212 244 7577

The Muses House – Kirazli, near Ephesus

Tucked away in a typical Turkish village 15km from Ephesus, in easy reach of the Aegean coast and many other classical sites, this boutique hotel – once an antique Greek villa – has five charming rooms, a pool and a restful courtyard garden. Free WiFi, delicious Turkish breakfast, excellent dinners, fully licensed.

www.museshouse.com info@museshouse.com

Tel 90-236 667 1125 Fax 90-236 667 1319

Witt Istanbul Suites

The designers from Autoban have helped to reinvent Ogilvy & Mather's Cihangir HQ as Istanbul's coolest pied-à-terre, a haven of luxury and sassy modernity (Ladder bookcases, Pumpkin coffee tables). The 17 huge suites (4 with sweeping views) have it all: marble kitchenettes, Ross Lovegrove bathrooms, Denizli-woven sheets, 24/7 room service.

reservation@wittistanbul.com www.wittistanbul.com

Tel 90-212 393 7900 Fax 90-212 393 7950

Armada Hotel – Istanbul

The Armada, in the historic Old City, puts you in the centre of genuine Istanbul. Unmissable sights such as Topkapı Palace and Ayasofya are a stroll away. The rooftop restaurant, with views of the Blue Mosque and the Sea of Marmara, is the perfect setting for a drink or dinner by moonlight to the rhythms of live gypsy music or traditional *fasil*.

www.armadahotel.com.tr
info@armadahotel.com.tr

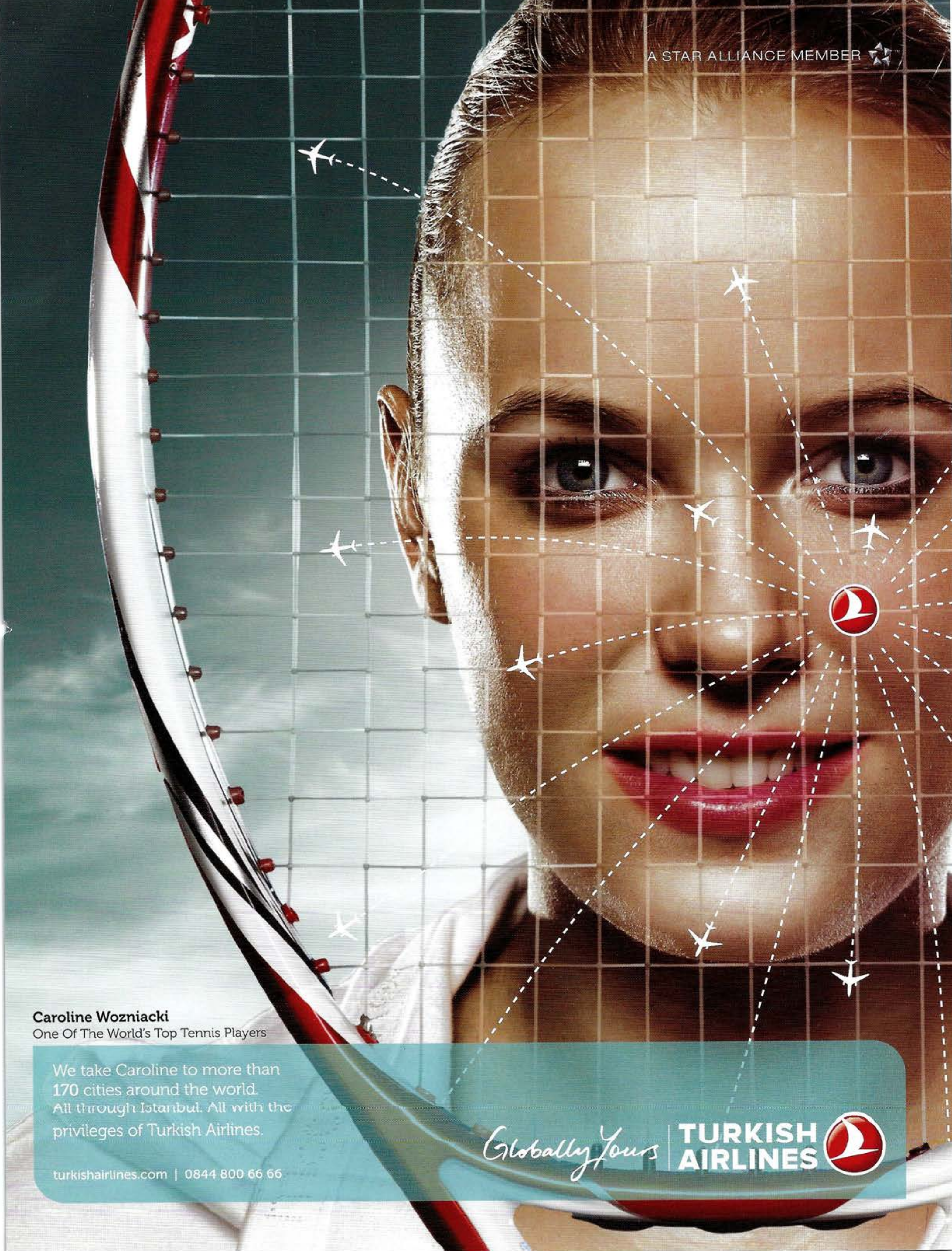
Tel 90-212 455 4455 Fax 90-212 455 4499

Turkoman Hotel
Sultanahmet, Istanbul

Ideally located in the heart of historic Sultanahmet, overlooking the Hippodrome and across the square from Ayasofya. The hotel's 20 rooms are decorated with hand-made carpets and antique furniture. The rooftop terrace has wonderful views of the Blue Mosque.

www.turkomanhotel.com
info@turkomanhotel.com

Tel 90-212 516 2956 Fax 90-212 516 2957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